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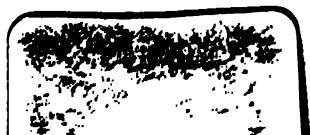
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THE DWARF.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONFERENCE.

I WAS now the Queen's Dwarf. True, the title might not be sonorous, and the service itself promised to be fraught with peril; but for these things I cared nothing. My ambition was in some measure gratified. I was looked upon, not according to my appearance, but

according to my intellect. I had already helped to do good service, and hoped to do still more, and I was content to bear all, dare all, and suffer all, in order to work out my own destiny. I thought over the particulars of my last conversation with the spirited Queen with singular satisfaction, because I saw, now more than ever, that in me she recognised a kindred spirit, and was therefore more likely to receive me with favor and treat me with respect. In what I had said relative to the Hungarians, I was confident that I had made a just report.

During the many months which Kristan and I had spent amongst them, I had uniformly heard Maria Theresa spoken of with an enthusiasm about which there could be no mistake.

With a sagacity natural to her, she had taken the right road to secure their allegiance, by recognising their fair claims, and establishing

their ancient rights and customs on a liberal basis.

After centuries of civil broils and dissensions, during which this gallant people bore with the utmost impatience the yoke of the House of Austria, they were now, for the first time, beginning to be content with it, and the new-found feeling had, in a great measure, sprung from the prudent concessions made by their new Sovereign, who, so far from diminishing her authority by the act, had made it still more indisputable, by thus yielding freely to their fair demands. All this I knew, and it was this knowledge which had prompted me to hazard the advice which was so singularly well taken, both because in itself it seemed reasonable, and because it happened to be that which the Queen herself had resolved upon.

After a period, I turned my thoughts to the approaching ordeal, in which I was to play a

a still more prominent part. Strange as it may appear, the contemplation gave me little trouble. My arrangements were all made—my course of proceedings determined upon—and secure in myself, my plans, and my instruments, I took it for granted that failure, if not impossible, was, at least, exceedingly improbable. As to the conference intended to be held in my presence, I was perfectly at my ease. Certain precautions were to be taken—certain things to be done, and if these were not accurately complied with by those who had the power of command and accomplishment in their own hands, I was determined that the responsibility must and should remain with them, since I was resolved that I would neither accept or chance it, save on my own terms. This was a hardy resolution, but the Queen's favor strengthened me, and, on the whole, as matters turned out, it was a wise one.

I had hardly concluded my meditations on the subject, when the door opened, and the Queen again entered, accompanied by the Duke and his brother, Prince Charles of Lorraine, the idol of the Austrian army, (and worthy of the distinction by his courage and great military talent), and attended by General Kevenhuller, Prince Lobkowitz, and the Counts Nugent and Traun.

When the Queen had taken her seat, she addressed herself to me, while every member of her council, who stood in a semicircle, regarded me with fixed, grave, and particular attention.

"You still persist," she said, "in your accusation against those noblemen of our court and kingdom, whose names you have mentioned as conspirators against our life?"

"I do, my liege."

"And you are willing to be judged by the effects of the plan which you have originated for their detection?"

"My liege, I am."

"It is proper you should be informed, and perfectly understand," she continued, "that an accusation, on your part, found to be false, will be attended with consequences unpleasant—perhaps fatal to yourself."

I bowed.

"And to your accomplice, if such he should turn out to be."

I bowed again.

"It is right, also, it should be told you, that the liquid delivered by you has been tried on various animals, and that we are informed minutely of its effects. You will, therefore, report what you expect those effects would be."

"For some time, my liege," I replied, unhesitatingly, "its effects would be unobserved. This period of apparent inaction would last according to the strength and size of the person or animal to which it is administered. Its

first *positive* effects would be preceded by languor and weakness, gradually ending in nausea and pain, which would speedily become intolerable, and be sure to end fatally, for no known antidote could preserve or even relieve the sufferer."

When I had ended, the Queen looked to the Duke, who had been recurring to his notes as I went on.

"He speaks the truth—such are the symptoms, and such the result," replied the Duke, in answer to her look.

The Queen touched a small silver bell, which lay before her on the table, and its tinklo had scarcely sounded, when Kristan entered.

He appeared to be prepared for the summons, and to be aware of the cause. At least, I supposed so, for on looking at him, I perceived that his timidity had vanished, and that he was now on very comfortable terms with

himself. In fact, matters had progressed more favorably than he had dared to expect, and now that an important piece of service was about to be rendered to the crown, he saw no reason why he should not plume himself a little on the credit of being one of the principal instruments who were to perform it. But the personages with whom he had now to deal, did not understand this kind of self-glorification, and when he adventured once or twice to speak without being commanded to do so, he was at once silenced in the most peremptory and decided terms.

On the contrary, the confidence refused to him was given unhesitatingly to me, and I was desired to give him such general directions as I thought might be useful for the furtherance of the end which all had in view. In doing so, I managed to make him understand more precisely the slippery ground on which we both stood, and that it demanded

the utmost circumspection on his part, particularly, not to show by any alteration of tone or manner, towards his intended employers, that he was not heartily in their service, and disposed to earn their gold.

“Your life may be said to be in your own hand,” I observed, “from this moment until the fetters are on the limbs of those who seek to make you the instrument of their enormous guilt. You have a part to play that will test all your powers, for you must appear eager, and yet not too much so, and you must insist on all precautions being taken for your escape with as much earnestness, as if you really meant to make the attempt. Remember that you are jealously watched by those who would not scruple to give you the death of a dog at a moment’s warning, if they even suspected you of treason to their cause ; and observe, moreover, that should we fail to establish their guilt, both you and I will incur a vast respon-

sibility, of which it will not be easy to rid ourselves without inconvenience."

After this significant preface, which had its effect upon him, I proceeded to give him more precise directions, to which he listened with the greatest attention, and when I had finished, he was desired, by the Duke of Lorraine, to hold himself in readiness to act according to my bidding on the following night.

Before he quitted the presence, I was again asked by the Queen herself, if I could be certain of his good faith and fidelity.

"I have no reason to doubt either, my liege," said I, readily. "If he has deceived me, he deceives himself still more, and I promise him that I will be the first to denounce his treachery, should I perceive the slightest appearance of it, as I have been the foremost to encourage him to be honest, loyal, and firm."

"More cannot be required or expected,"

said Prince Charles, smiling. "The proposition is a fair one, my liege, and, fortunately, we now hold in our own hands the means to prevent all evil consequences, and to punish either treachery or falsehood, should they appear."

The Great Kristan was dismissed, wearing a much more modest air than when he entered the royal closet, and shortly after the members of the conference or consultation separated, and I was left once more alone.

CHAPTER II.

PREPARATIONS.

ALL that day and the next I was left to myself. I was sedulously attended, however, by the same ancient servitor, who had brought me my first meal, but the shades of evening had fallen, and still my solitude was perfectly unbroken. This was not unpleasant to me. I had the gift of a lively imagination, and he who possesses that, can boast, at least, that in

some degree he is independent of the external world. True it is, that this gift may become a blessing or a curse, as we use it or abuse it.

Men of weak minds and indolent habits may live on phantasy until every other food becomes distasteful to them, while, to him of high purpose and generous ambition, it is often the *pabulum vitæ*, from which is elaborated all that constitutes fame, secures power, or insures respectability.

The absurd day-dreamer who loiters through life, awaiting the realization of visions begotten of a diseased fancy and ill-regulated mind, (and there are many of the species abroad), is a mere incubus on society—a drone in the hive, which it is the duty of the more energetic members to discountenance and avoid; but he who to great and seemingly impossible conceptions, adds a daring and determined will—a resolution to suffer and suc-

ceed—who fixes his eye on the mountain height, and thinks no toil too great to reach the summit—*that* man's career is likely to be worthy of record, even though insurmountable obstacles should cross his path, and blast his hopes, and end his aspirations in an early grave.

I have always, myself, been a visionary of the latter class, and I have not a doubt that it has been beneficial to me, in a general sense. It has been the precursor of success, because it looked for and prepared for it, and because it left as little as possible to chance, and forestalled obstacles by previously considering how the greatest might be overcome.

Young as I was, there was no possible combination of circumstances that could take me by surprise, because, in the depths of the forest or in the darkness of night, I had met with, and, in fancy, surmounted them. There was

no path so precarious that I had not trodden, no peril so great that I had not dared, no foe so powerful that I had not coped with, no fate so disastrous that I had not looked at with an unflinching eye. My heart was steel, my nerves were adamant, my spirit never sunk nor was shaken in these fantastic encounters, and now, in the real struggle of life, I found the benefit of all these visionary engagements with Fortune, inasmuch, as with great readiness of resource and aptness of application, they brought also that perfect self-reliance, which, perhaps, can only be completely attained by those who, in silence and solitude, have dipped deep into the secret places of their own souls, and learned accurately to measure their weakness as well as their strength.

I trouble my readers with these observations, in order that they may understand perfectly, why it was, that at this critical period of my life, I was so firm and self-pos-

sessed as I have stated myself to be. I really do not wish either to conceal my own defects or to exaggerate my own achievements, such as they were, but, at the same time, I think it is only fairly due to myself to exhibit clearly the state and habits of my own mind, because the principles of action which influenced me will thereby be more clearly understood, and it will be seen that my imperturbability proceeded as much or more, from forethought and preparation, as from reckless personal daring, or natural insensibility to the possible perils which might, without the nicest management, spring from the enterprise in which I had so deliberately engaged.

To say the truth, during the many hours, in which I was now left to myself, the coming incidents of the evening, eventful as I knew they must be, played a very subordinate part in my meditations. The line of action which I had resolved upon, had been long clearly

marked out in my own mind—the chances of success or failure sufficiently thought over—the variation of circumstances provided against—and all this was a sufficient guarantee to myself that every contingency had been attended to, and, so far as I could, provided for. This knowledge was quite enough for me, and I had early dismissed the matter partly from my mind, in order to occupy it with the equally novel and engrossing subjects of my engagements with the Queen and of her Majesty's position and apparently precarious prospects. It was evident enough that her councillors and principal adherents took a gloomy, or, at least, a doubtful view of them; and equally evident was it, that she herself had higher hopes and a more indomitable spirit, and that while I sympathized with the one, I earnestly applauded the other.

This unity of thought established a link of congenial feeling between us, which, whilst

It raised me in my own estimation, roused every sentiment of my better nature, and bound me to her interests with a force and fervor, which no after circumstances could diminish.

Let me add, in justice to myself, that it was not solely the ambition to become the confidant of a person so exalted which principally moved me. I think and hope that I would have done as much as in her cause I proposed to do, had she been of humbler rank and similarly threatened—that is, provided I had discovered in her the same indomitable spirit, coupled with the same kind and womanly heart. For I did not, and could not forget, that amidst her own many sources of distracting thought, she had condescended to remember those about whom she naturally believed me to be interested, and without even knowing the gentle and innocent girl for whose well-being I was so anxious, that

she had made her the special object of her attention and care. Had she studied the surest way to secure my devotion, she could not have chosen a more direct path, and the sentiment sunk deeper into my heart, because I knew and felt that her kindness was spontaneous, and proceeded from the instincts of a noble and generous nature rather than from any more selfish or worldly cause.

My moods of meditation always produced abstraction, and in my present state of total pre-occupation, which had gradually mounted until it became intense, I heard or felt nothing until a gentle hand was laid on my shoulder.

Astonished, and a little abashed, I started up and became aware that Maria Theresa herself was before me. She was now dressed in her magnificent court robes, and glittered amidst gems, which flashed as she moved, and almost created a halo around her princely person. I

dare say she was pleased at the evident blending of respect and admiration which my features and manner evinced at her presence ; for she smiled graciously, and her voice was kindly and encouraging, as she addressed me.

“ You have thought deeply, Gerald—are you still assured that you have reasoned rightly and judged accurately ? ”

“ My liege, I am.”

“ Then follow me.”

The ancient servant, of whom I have before spoken, awaited her at the door of the chamber, with a lamp in his hand, and as soon as she appeared, he led the way reverentially, and preceded us through several long and complicated passages, until, by a slide door, we entered a large saloon, or chamber, magnificently furnished, and splendidly illuminated with a hundred perfumed lamps.

At present, it was completely untenanted,

save by ourselves, and the Queen evinced no fear of being intruded upon, as her movements were measured and deliberate.

At the upper end of this gorgeous room, were two raised seats, one of which was somewhat lower than the other, over which was raised a canopy, the hangings of which were velvet and gold. To this canopy the Queen advanced, and drawing aside the internal drapery of crimson silk which hung in loose festoons, slightly looped up, here and there, with thick gilded cords, she showed me where, and after what fashion, to dispose my small person, so as to suffer little or no inconvenience myself in my ambush, while my presence might be made available at the very moment I was wanted.

I listened quietly to her directions, and then took my place, at once, in the position assigned me.

When these arrangements were made to her satisfaction, she bestowed upon me a few parting words of encouragement, and then quitted the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE THRONE-ROOM AND ITS OCCUPANTS.

It might be about half-an-hour after the Queen had left the apartment, that the large folding doors were thrown open by a suite of servants dressed in the royal livery, and almost immediately after, the guests of the evening began to arrive.


I disposed the drapery of the throne around me, so as to permit of my having a limited

view of the assembly, and a complete hearing of whatsoever might occur, and then set myself to watch the coming event.

The majority of those who first entered the room were young military men, dressed in full costume, but still, I thought, wearing amidst their gaudy court display, a serious and settled air.

At first, they gathered together in detached groups, and conversed in under tones, but with considerable animation; as fresh arrivals poured in, however, these little coteries quietly dispersed themselves about the room, although I remarked that a considerable number kept constantly hovering near the throne.

By degrees, the circle filled, although, as I afterwards heard, many of its ordinary frequenters had made good their retreat from a capital so seriously threatened as Vienna was at the time.



Still the room was tolerably full, and amongst the company were a good number of ladies, one of whom particularly caught my attention. It was my mother. She was loaded with ornament, but her eye was heavy and dull, and her air and manner were absent and melancholy.

I confess that I was not sorry to see that her feelings were at war with her appearance, and I even flattered myself that our last interview, in some degree, accounted for the salutary change apparent in her, for such I hoped it to be.

After a little time, General Kevenhuller entered, accompanied by Count Nugent. Shortly after, came Prince Charles of Lorraine and Count Traun, and finally the Court itself arrived—consisting of the Queen and the Grand Duke, surrounded and attended by the great officers of state, amongst whom my eye

fixed itself on the Black Baron, and never left him.

Charged, as that brilliant society was, with all the elements of discord and destruction, the thought struck me, as I surveyed the scene, so outwardly tranquil and imposing, how different, in reality, were the materials of which it was composed from what they professed to be, and on what slight hinges do the fate and fortunes of all so deemed best worth preserving sometimes turn. These moving figures before me, so fraught with their own well-devised schemes, and so priding themselves on their own nicely regulated feelings, seemed to me, at this moment, little better than a set of puppets moved by my insignificant will. Had my ambition been a single atom less high-hearted than it was, I think I should have forsworn it for ever, as I contemplated that proud scene of earthly grandeur, and felt that a single wave of my hand—a single word

of my tongue, could almost dissolve it into chaos; and I smiled at the presumption of the gilded atoms around me, who thought at this moment that the fate of empires and millions rested on *their* designs, when the breath of one—pointed at by them as a monstrosity—could dissipate the whole at a touch, and play towards them the part of that destiny in which they so much trusted, but of which they were at that moment the idlest sport.

The evening receptions of Maria Theresa, at least at that particular time, partook of rather a homely and hospitable character. People met, and mingled, and chatted together, after paying their respects to Majesty; and, at intervals, refreshments were handed round to the guests, while the Queen and the Duke mixed freely with their courtiers, and she, in particular, often originated a conversation, and

then listened to others as they continued it, for the purpose of quietly discovering for herself, more accurately, the mental calibre of those around her, as well as in order to glean from their conversation some particular information which it was her object to obtain.

On this eventful evening, she seemed particularly gracious and condescending. With ineffable grace and dignified ease, she traversed the room in different directions; sometimes pausing with the young and beautiful, to make a sportive remark, or pay a gay and graceful compliment to their looks, their dress, or their accomplishments; and then gliding in amongst a knot of statesmen or philosophers, whom she encouraged to commence or continue a discussion, by her affability and the earnest attention she bestowed upon what they said.

Among the military groups she made a briefer stay, merely addressing to them some

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slight observation, and then passing on, in smiling converse, with her more serious, but equally guarded, Duke ; who accompanied her movements and assisted in her views.

Her whole progress was, to me, a deeply anxious, yet delightful, source of study. Not for a single instant did she evince the slightest feelings, by look or movement, that seemed like fear or irresolution. Had she walked in perfect ignorance of the treason that threatened her — of the uncertainty which surrounded her—of the many enemies, public and private, with whom she was about to cope, her features could not have been more placid, her voice more firm, or her step more assured and regal in its tread. I felt proud to call myself the servant of one so well deserving the homage of brave and gallant men ; and the honest flush of gratified and exalted feeling rose to my brow, as I marked her general bearing, and thought, that I—I, was, in all human pro-

bability, destined to be the instrument of her preservation.

At last the moment of trial approached—the clock struck.

It was the well-known custom of the Queen to retire from the circle at ten o'clock, previous to which she generally partook of a slight repast, served to herself and the Grand Duke, while her guests were similarly served at the same time. All this was done as usual. Cakes, dried fruits, and confections of various kinds were the more substantial matters; and the liquids consisted of wines, sherbets, ices, coffee, and so on—as the different tastes of individuals dictated.

The arrangements were these. The matters were placed on tables, to which those who wished to partake of them proceeded, or they were helped as they sat, if they wished it. At the commencement of this slender meal, I observed that the Black Baron, who had

been absent from the room for some time, had re-entered and taken his seat by the side of my mother, and her party, which consisted of three or four young ladies, to whom she seemed to play the part of *chaperone*. Apparently, his whole attention was given to this group, although I could perceive that, ever and anon, the glance of his large, dark eye, was hurriedly thrown towards the seat of honor, where the Queen, selecting a bunch of green grapes, was employed in leisurely plucking them one by one from the branch and eating them, while she conversed, in an easy tone, with Prince Charles, who stood by her side, wearing a sober and determined air.

As yet the Great Kristan had not made his appearance among the royal servants, but, at length, the Queen calling to her a page, said a single word to the boy, who bowed low, and instantly disappeared.

At this time all was perfectly quiet; every person was so seated or arranged, as to leave the middle of the magnificent chamber unoccupied.

A minute or two elapsed, and then the royal page returned, followed by Kristan, bearing in his hand a tray, on which was placed a silver cup, richly chased and studded with precious stones.

To give the conjurer his due—and I looked at him with a great deal of curiosity, mingled with apprehension—he behaved admirably. His step was firm, his features were composed, though somewhat pale, and without looking to the right or to the left, he carried his slight load, with perfect coolness and self-possession, to the Queen's seat, where, kneeling on one knee, he presented it.

Glancing deliberately round the entire circle, she took the goblet in her hand, without

raising it to her lips, and pausing for a short time, she again took even a more deliberate survey of her guests.

At this engrossing moment I looked towards the Baron, and saw that he was busily talking to an old lady who had joined his group, but that his eyes were rivetted to the ground. Meanwhile, after completing her survey and satisfying herself, the Queen handed the still untasted cup to Prince Charles of Lorraine, who received it deferentially, and then calling the page again to her side, she whispered a few words to him, and once more making his courtly obeisance, the lad went straightway up to the seat of the Black Baron and spoke to him.

The Baron rose instantly from his seat when he had received the royal message ; but his air was changed. His face flushed, and then darkened ; he cast a troubled glance

towards Kristan, who, on his part, was observing the movements of his royal mistress, and saw it not; but, after a momentary hesitation, and putting another question to the page, he walked towards the throne and stood before it. Meanwhile, the page proceeded to different parts of the room, and selecting four individuals, he delivered his message to them also. I marked these men and curiously noted their demeanour; none of them received it indifferently or as a royal message is generally encountered. One questioned the page hastily but earnestly; a second became instantly as pale as death, but obeyed the summons given him; a third looked at the Baron, at Kristan, and at the door of the chamber; and the fourth, a small, square-built man, portly, but by no means aristocratic, affected an air of indifference which his looks belied. Still the royal mandate was imperative on all—none dare disobey it,

and within a very short period, the whole group stood, face to face, with their intended victim.

As the last of them approached, the Queen and the Duke rose from their seats, and then, in a firm and composed voice, Maria Theresa said, pointing her finger to the right of the throne as she did so—

“My lords, before I question you, you will take your places *there*. My page will marshal you.”

The lad, with great gravity, placed them side by side, in line, to which arrangement they submitted without question or remonstrance, although evidently not without surprise. When this was done, Prince Charles of Lorraine, still with the goblet in his hand, advanced gravely up to the Baron of Erlsfurth, who was the first, and offering it to him, said, in an audible voice—

“The Queen, my lord, your sovereign and

mine, commands you to pledge her in this cup. Drink—”

At this moment of imminent danger, the Baron's characteristic hardihood returned. He saw that he was betrayed, and scorning to wince or falter, he bowed slightly to the Prince, and said to him, with a smile—

“I thank you, sir, for being my cup-bearer ; but I do not thirst.”

Prince Charles made no reply, but passed on to the second, and in precisely the same words and tone, repeated the invitation.

“I—I dare not, sir,” was the confused reply.

“*Dare* not, my lord ?” said the Prince ; “and wherefore dare you not ?”

“I—I have drank but lately, and my head is bad,” said the person addressed, with still greater confusion of manner, and striving to cover his first blunder.

Prince Charles, however, accepted his ex-

cuse, or appeared to do so, and passed on to the third, a thin, spare man, who turned deadly pale as the Prince repeated, for the third time, his invitation. For a moment the culprit gazed at him, and then his regards were turned to the fatal cup, which was still extended towards him. At length he faltered forth the words—

“I have done wrong—I will confess.”

“Confess to what, my lord?” demanded the Prince.

“I do protest ——” broke in the Black Baron.

“Silence, sir,” interrupted the Prince; “you shall be heard when her Majesty’s commands have been obeyed, and not till then.”

Turning to the fourth, in order in the group, he again repeated his formula, unheeding of the offer of confession which he had just received. The individual, to whom the Prince

now spoke, did not answer, save by a low bow, and the fifth and last saved the trouble of repetition—

“Your Highness,” he said, calmly, “must have some extraordinary motive for making a demand so perfectly unusual. If it be her Majesty’s pleasure, I desire to be informed why it is that I, or those other noblemen who are ranged thus strangely by my side, are required to partake of a beverage solely designed for the royal use, and why it is, moreover, that we are commanded to do so in so very unusual a fashion?”

“You do refuse it, my lord?” was Prince Charles’s only answer.

A silent bow, but the cup remained untouched.

At this moment there was a perfect—almost a solemn silence throughout the saloon, as the various groups, who had heretofore been conversing together, had been struck by the

singularity of the scene, and were now anxiously watching the denouement. This silence was first broken by Maria Theresa herself, who ordered Kristan to be placed before her, and when he was so, she pointed to the cup, still in the Prince of Lorraine's hand, and asked the conjurer, in a quiet, grave tone, if he knew what it contained :—

“I do, my liege,” he answered, in a firm voice. “It contains Poison, designed for your Majesty by these noblemen, whom his Highness has addressed, and whose agent or instrument I was hired to be.”

“Again I say I do protest——”

“We command you to be silent, my lord,” said the Queen, turning with calm dignity to the Black Baron, from whom the exclamation proceeded. “Your protest shall be heard in due time, and listened to patiently, when we have traced clearly, both for our own sakes and for the information of our assembled

nobles and subjects, the links of a conspiracy which shocks us by its turpitude as much as it grieves us by its ingratitude."

After the delivery of this speech, the Queen, suddenly drawing aside that portion of the curtain which concealed me, ordered me to come forth.

There was a murmur of surprise—perhaps of a stronger and more mysterious feeling—when I answered the Queen's command and emerged from my hiding-place. Every one, however, was too anxious to hear, what was yet to come, to hazard more than a mere manifestation of wonder; and again, in a moment, the silence was as deep and breathless as before.

I answered the leading questions, put to me by my royal mistress herself, readily and briefly; and then, by her Majesty's command, I commenced a more systematic narrative from the period at which the first intimation of the

intentions of the conspirators had been made to me by Kristan.

I went over the ground, inch by inch, leaving nothing untouched that could enlighten the hearers, or vindicate the truth. I spoke clearly, boldly, and fluently; and long before I had finished, I saw that the sympathies of the audience were completely with me.

When I had made an end, I made my obeisance, and retired a few steps to the left of the throne, amidst a general murmur of courtly approbation.

Standing calmly on the second step of the throne, Maria Theresa followed me by a short address to those around her, for the whole circle had gradually pressed forward, and now stood in a sort of semicircle, the military men placing themselves nearest to the accused. She explained her reasons for selecting this particular manner of detecting the traitors, by stating, that situated as her affairs now were,

she considered it needful for her honor, and for the maintenance of her character for justice, to prove their criminality, by undeniable evidence before those who were not only competent to judge for themselves of what had passed and was occurring; but who would retain the whole in their memories, and place it in a proper light before the world.

“It is known to all,” she said, “that these men have been of our council, and were advocates of what they called an honorable peace, but which I term the highest dishonor. They would have had me submit to robbery rather than risk danger, and they sold themselves to my causeless enemies, when I hesitated to deprive my children of their inheritance, and determined to defend it while I have a follower or a friend to assist me in the attempt. Had their arrest been made in secret, calumny would have branded it as unjust, and

had the trial now made by our good and gallant brother been less public than it was, slander would have assailed it, and termed it a state device got up to attack and punish innocent men, by those to whom their reasonable advice was offered and refused. But now, our friends and faithful subjects, you have witnessed this most painful and revolting exhibition, and you are given an opportunity to state in public the impression it has made, while, on our own part, we are conscious of having fairly fulfilled our duty to others and ourselves. We are ready, in the same public manner, to hear whatsoever exculpation those so criminated may now be able to adduce, and to give to them the same attentive ear which we have already bestowed on their accusers."

She had hardly concluded her sensible and spirited address, when Count Kanitz, the in-

dividual amongst the accused who had previously offered to confess, left their ranks, and tottering rather than walking to the foot of the throne, he faltered forth a declaration, amounting, in effect, to a wholesale confession of the entire diabolical scheme. He stated, moreover, that the prime mover and instigator was the Baron of Erlsfurth—that he himself and his companions were incautiously led to listen to his guilty proposals, by the splendid offers of advancement and reward made to them in the name of Louis of France, and the Elector of Bavaria—and he concluded the whole by professing his repentance, and throwing himself on the mercy of his offended Sovereign.

The Queen received this candid but cowardly confession with a cold air and a scornful brow, and merely saying to him that his avowal would be recorded, and made use

of, at the proper time, she turned to Prince Charles of Lorraine, at a signal from whom, Count Nugent advanced, and laying his hand on the Black Baron's shoulder, said to him—

“I arrest you, Baron of Erbsfurth, of high treason against the person of her Majesty the Queen.”

He then passed on to the rest, and, with the same formality, repeated the arrest. As he concluded, he drew his sword, and this was the signal for every officer present to do the same.

In a moment, a sufficient guard was formed around the prisoners, for such they now were, and they were ordered to move on.

With a gloomy and sullen air, the Black Baron put himself in motion, while his companions in misfortune took their places, and left the presence under the conduct of their aristocratic guard.

Their departure was the signal for a general movement in the courtly circle who remained.

The Queen received the congratulations of her guests with mild and quiet dignity, directing the especial notice of those whom she most regarded to me, as a young gentleman of noble birth and great talent, a near relative of Count Nugent, (she never named my mother,) and whom she felt it her duty to protect and to advance, not only for my exertions for her own preservation, which were great, but because she believed me to be possessed of abilities well calculated to do honor to myself, and to be of service to my country.

* * * * *

What became of my unfortunate mother,

during these transactions, I know not. She had disappeared early, however, and when I looked to where I had previously seen her seated, she was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN'S PROGRESS.

I WAS now a royal favorite, and it is wonderful what a change such a designation makes in the fortunes even of him who has the misfortune to be born a dwarf. The perfect success of the scheme suggested by me, for the detection of and open exposure of the band of traitors, raised me to the height of popularity at once,

not only with those whom I had so materially served ; but in the general estimation also. The Queen, herself, was the first to recognise the value and importance of my services ; and all those who revered her person, or wished well to her cause, were not slow to follow the royal example.

Apartments were allotted me in the palace, for the present ; and, as all necessity for concealment was at an end, I was given to understand that I might consider myself my own master, and go abroad whenever I pleased.

A carriage was placed at my disposal, and it will be readily believed that the first use which I made of my recovered freedom was to visit the friends whom I had so unwillingly quitted.

I found them as I had left them—rich in affection for myself ; and with but one source of regret—that of being separated from me.

It amused me to hear Abraham's account of his supervision of the Milenka's studies, and his care of herself; although, when the exact truth of the matter came to be known, it would appear that *he* was the person protected and cared for—as he had been too long used to total dependance on me to be either a wise provider or an effective governor, either of others or himself.

For the first time, I made the Milenka a confidante of my late proceedings, and informed her of the position in which I now stood. She listened to me, at first, with wonder, then with alarm, and, finally, her countenance expressed the deepest melancholy; and she sighed heavily, as I ended my narration.

“You are not sorry, dear Milenka,” said I, “that I have prospered so far, and succeeded so well?”

“Sorry, Zenco—no,” she answered, struggling to keep down her tears.

"Why then do you sigh—wherefore do you weep? Why not rejoice, as I have cause to do?"

"Alas! dear Zenco, our fates are different," she said, patiently. "You will become the favorite of a queen, and take the place in society which your birth and talents entitle you to, while I must again resume my former avocation, and once more become the daughter and dependent on Kristan."

"But Kristan is changed as well as I," said I; "he will be provided for, and it must depend on himself, if he should not become a prosperous man. You do not think so poorly of me as to suppose that I could ever forget you, Milenka?"

"No—not that, Zenco—but—" she paused, blushed, and hung down her head.

"But what?" said I, taking her hand.

"Ah! Zenco, you do not understand my heart," she replied, without looking at me;

"you cannot know what it is to find a friend such as you have been to me, and then to lose him just when he becomes most necessary to your happiness and peace."

"And am I so to you?"

She raised her eye to mine for a single moment, and there was a world of eloquence in it, that enlightened me more than a volume of words could have done.

"Then—you love me, dear Milenka?" I asked, almost as deeply agitated as herself.

"Can you not answer for me?" she said, as she slightly turned away her head.

"But consider, dearest Milenka," said I, impressively, "that this is no slight avowal—no common admission. Remember to whom and what you speak. I am but a dwarf—cast your eye upon me, and think if I am one to create a feeling of love in one so blessed by nature as you are, with all that she has denied

to me ; or if a feeling of gratitude or association should now raise me in your estimation, pause and consider before you pledge yourself to a sentiment which hereafter you may think of with deep but unavailing regret."

"I *have* thought, Zenco."

"Well?"

"And the result of my meditation is that I—I look upon you as the dearest friend my heart can ever know."

I folded her in my arms at this candid avowal, and proud and prosperous as my present position was, in the royal favor, I felt myself elevated still more, in my own estimation, by having thus had the good fortune to secure the sympathy and affection of so pure and noble a heart.

We sat together for an hour or two, and during that time we had arranged our future proceedings, and provided for her future wants. She informed me that an aged man, in a cloak,

who, from her description, I recognized as the servant who had waited on me during my ambush in the royal closet, had twice paid her a visit during my absence ; the first time to assure her that I was well ; and on the second occasion to tell her that I would soon return to her, and to ask her if she required any thing ; as he had been commissioned by a friend of mine to supply her. Her answer was in the negative, but it had given her great consolation to hear of and from me, and to learn that I was safe, and had not forgotten her. In these acts of unsolicited and thoughtful kindness, I recognized the mind of my royal mistress, and it added to my feelings of devotion to her, when I remembered, that environed with perils of no ordinary moment herself, she could thus stoop to think of others and to watch over them.

Two things were resolved on between us, the Milenka, and I :—Namely, that, at present,

our engagement should be kept secret, until the trials, still impending over the Queen, should eventuate in victory or defeat ; and the other was that she and Abraham (who was no longer to be called Bregzag,) should remove nearer to the palace, so as that I could visit them as frequently as my attention to whatsoever my duties might be, would permit. I promised to communicate with Kristan respecting these matters, but I fancied that so long as he was to be called upon to defray no part of the expense, I was pretty sure of his concurrence to whatsoever I thought proper to propose.

In fact, after leaving the Milenka, I sought out the conjurer as soon as I returned to the palace, and found him in the first flush of triumph, and fully restored to that self-confidence which formed so material an item in his character.

“ Her Majesty,” he said, triumphantly, “ has

been graciously pleased to reward my services by making me a gentleman usher to the Duke. I am no longer to wear a livery, Zenco—you perceive I have discarded it already—and I have substituted this coat of cut velvet, and this crimson satin vest, which, with point ruffles, a new bag, and a gold hilted sword—”

“All of which will cost money,” interrupted I, “of which, at present, her Majesty or his Highness, the Duke, have little to spare. Let me advise you, as a friend, Kristan, to cushion your finery for a space, and, in the mean time, to remember that you have a daughter to provide for and a life to preserve.”

“I—I do not understand you, Zenco,” he said, with a blank countenance.

“So far as you have latterly gone,” I continued, “you have gained the good opinion of all just men, and you have deserved it; but you cannot fail to remember that if you have

refused to assist the Black Baron in one act of atrocious guilt, you were not always so scrupulous; and that at an early period of your life, you submitted to become his instrument, and to assist and carry out schemes which made him a richer man at the expense of every feeling which, as a relative, a man, or a christian, he was most bound to remember. You cannot deny this?"

"It is not friendly to remind me of it," he said, in a downcast and somewhat discontented tone.

"It cannot be forgotten, while the injustice done by your compliance remains still to be remedied," said I. "I have bound myself to reinstate the Milenka in the position from which you have assisted to depose her, and you know me well enough to be aware that I mean to keep my word."

"But I—I have sworn, Zenco," he said.

"Sworn, have you—to what?"

"To keep the Baron's secret while he lives."

"Well, his life is like to be a short one," said I, "for he has written his own doom by his own acts. He and his companions will leave their prison only for a scaffold, and as his period of life will be but short, I do not ask you to break your oath, until at least we see whether fate befriends him more than he deserves, and permits him still to remain in a world which his vices have disgraced. But I will have no evasion—remember that. When the proper time comes and I demand from you a categorical answer to a plain question, it must be given—*must*, Kristan, or the same weapons I have turned against others I can use against you."

I did not wait to hear his answer, but I knew him well enough to suppose that he would not allow his scruples to interfere with his interest when I seriously set about inter-

rogating him relative to the Milenka and her fortunes.

At present, however, I thought the time had not arrived for that.

In the pressing emergency of the Queen's affairs, it would not do to trouble her with a matter of purely domestic interest, in which my own personal feelings were concerned.

It was enough for me to know that the object of my care and affection was safe and well, and that her oppressor was now disabled of all power to injure her. Kristan was not likely to turn restive, or to leave his present position for his former precarious mode of life; and having thus satisfied my anxiety on the subject, I returned to my own apartments to await whatever orders I might receive.

For two or three days subsequent to this, I was left pretty much to myself, and during this time I found means to provide the Mi-

lenka and Abraham with a new residence, in a more open and airy site.

Once or twice I had been visited by Count Nugent, who had been specially deputed by Maria Theresa to look after me, and to press upon me a reward, in gold; but encouraged by the frank character and friendly familiarity of the good old man, I took the liberty of rejecting the intended gift and of stating my motives for doing so.

“Her majesty gives me her countenance and accepts my services,” said I, “and I am already supplied at her charge, with all that I require—my bed and my board. Were she seated firmly on her throne, as I hope to live to see her, with the revenues of her empire at her own undisputed control, I should think myself wanting in humility, were I to decline whatsoever bounty she might condescend to bestow; but while her necessities obliged her to accept the subsidies of

others, I cannot consent to diminish her means even by a single coin ; and I trust that you, Count, will place my reason in the proper light before her, and condescend to inform her, if necessary, that I am amply provided with means of my own to defray all my expenses, until the downfall of her enemies shall place larger funds at her disposal."

He wrung my hand warmly and said—

"She shall hear your very words, Gerald, and I am proud to be deputed by you to bear them to her. You do but as I and other devoted and loyal servants are doing ; but you have yet to learn the many virtues of the noble spirit for whom you are willing to make the sacrifice, whilst I have known her from a child, and am bound to her house by every tie that can actuate a soldier or a man."

"True, sir," said I, "and the very fact

of your devotion to her cause proves that it must be a just one, and, as such, however low the cloud may lour upon it now, I, for one, have no fear for the result."

He shook his head doubtfully, but kept his mind to himself.

Shortly afterwards he left me, and I saw him no more for the remainder of the day.

At an early hour the next morning, however, I was summoned to the presence of Maria Theresa herself.

She was seated in the royal closet, which I had cause to remember so well, and, as I passed along the corridors and galleries, I remarked an unusual bustle in the palace, and saw numbers of servants and officers hurrying to and fro, with marks of unusual hurry in their appearance and pace.

The Queen herself was seated composedly at a table as I entered, looking over papers, with a pen in her hand, and apparently en-

gaged in noting their contents in a small book.

For a minute or two, she did not notice me, but at last she flung down her pen, and turning to me, said in a placid, and even cheerful tone of voice—

“So, young gentleman, you have refused to receive our gold, and are determined that we shall remain your debtor, whether we will or no. Be it so ; you are one of those from whom even a Queen may receive a favor without jeopardizing her dignity by doing so. We must study how to repay you hereafter. You have seen your friend, the Milenka ?”

“I have, my liege.”

“We had thought to see her ourselves, and judge whether she be worthy of the chivalrous regard she has had the good fortune to obtain ; but time and fortune both run counter to our wishes, and we must postpone our desire until a happier season. Come nearer to me,

Gerald," she continued, with a still more condescending air.

I approached within a foot or two of where she sat.

"I am about to take a journey," she said, in a graver tone, "and I shall require to have those around me in whose loyalty and affection I can implicitly trust; I have named you as one of my principal attendants, and shall, for the present, require your services to act as my private secretary, as I have not the implicit trust in the person who lately filled that post, which the importance of the office demands. He has been dismissed, therefore, and you will oblige me by taking his place."

I hastened to profess my willingness, but hesitated a little from my fear of incapacity. On that head her Majesty dissipated my scruples at once.

"I shall be always near you," she said, "or

rather, we will work together, and, therefore, any acts of omission or commission on your part, as a novice, can be at once rectified by myself. I have no fear of you, however; you possess sagacity, industry, and fidelity; and these are the qualities I look for and desire to obtain. You have firmness of mind and courage also, and as I am now about to adopt a step which was once suggested by yourself, you will have an additional motive in using your best exertions to forward its success. By the advice of my council, and indeed, with my own perfect concurrence, I am about to leave Vienna in an hour, and to try what the presence and appeal of their Sovereign will do to arouse the courage and stimulate the zeal of my Hungarian subjects. You will agree with me, I think, in the propriety of such a proceeding."

This she said with the manner of a condescending friend, rather than with the authority of a mistress or a queen.

It wanted, perhaps, but this appearance of confidence on her part to give the last touch to my devotion. I did not profess much, however, but she was too accurate an observer not to perceive that she had conferred upon me a reward which bound me, heart and soul, to her interests for ever.

This eventful journey, which may be said to have been the turning point of Maria Theresa's fortunes, was to be conducted secretly and speedily. The Grand Duke was to remain behind, in order to overlook the operations for the defence of the capital, and to consult with its defenders, or to proceed to other quarters where his presence might be useful; and as the Great Kristan was now in *his* service, I thought it necessary, as I had but an hour for preparation, and could write only a few hurried lines of farewell to the Milenka, to commit her seriously and sacredly to her *soi-disant* father's charge.

"I will guard her as my life," said he, magniloquently, as I concluded.

"Guard her as she deserves to be guarded," I replied gravely, "and, in doing so, remember that you undertake a service both of honor and danger."

"Danger, Zenco !" he said, recoiling a little, more at the manner than the matter of my appeal. "Surely there can be no danger in so simple an office as looking after the care of a young girl—now as the Baron is a prisoner, and likely to be so."

"But I am not," said I, quietly.

"You ? but you are not her enemy, Zenco ?"

"No ; but I shall become the determined enemy of him who undertakes a trust, without a heartfelt intention of fulfilling it with zeal, energy, and sleepless fidelity," said I, sternly. "I do not doubt your present intention, friend Kristan ; but the habits of your mind are not

those of a settled or steady man, and exposed, as you now may be, in these wild times, to temptation and trial, it is necessary to warn you that a keen eye and an anxious heart are watching you, although thousands of miles may separate us, for I swear to you, on the faith of a Christian and the honour of a gentleman, that your own safety depends on the due observance of the responsibility you have undertaken."

"If I thought that——"

"If you thought otherwise you were a fool, and should have known me better," interjected I, more sternly than before; "and if in consequence of what I have said you meditate retracting your promise, it will be to me a token that you never intended honestly to fulfil it. Do so, if you please, therefore, but take the consequence along with the act."

"You are so rash—so hasty, Zenco!" said he, with a humbled and mortified air.

“You mistake,” I replied; “I am neither the one nor the other. What I say I mean, and what I mean I shall as certainly execute. I say again that I do not doubt your present good intentions and resolutions; it is your weakness, your indolence, your love of pleasure, and general laxity of principle, I distrust. Knowing as I do that the Milenka is not your child, and anxious as I am for her well-being, it is as her former guardian that I commit her to your charge, and as myself her devoted friend, I distinctly warn you, that your compact must be kept. This much service I have a right to expect; for I have earned it at your hands, and as I shall have the means either to reward or to punish hereafter, so do I pledge myself to you that your own best interests depend upon your faith. Now let us part as friends, in the hope to continue so when we shall meet again. When I may be able to return to Vienna I know not;

but, in the mean time, I shall manage to hear of you and from you, and shall let you do the same. Farewell."

In another hour I had departed from Vienna, for Hungary, in the suite of its Queen, and elevated to the double office of her dwarf and private secretary.

CHAPTER V.

HUNGARY.

WE reached Hungary in safety, and the reception of Maria Theresa there is a historical fact, well known, and equally honorable to the subjects who gave way to, and the sovereign who deserved the enthusiasm which her presence amongst that gallant people excited. Assembling states of the kingdom at Presburgh, she

appeared before them, with her infant boy, the heir of all her greatness, in her arms, and addressed them in that brief but eloquent speech, of which history has recorded few better calculated to win its way to the hearts of brave and honest men—

“Abandoned by my friends,” she said, “persecuted by my enemies, and attacked by my nearest relatives, I have no resource left but in your fidelity and valour. On you alone I depend for relief; and into your hands I commit with confidence the son of your sovereign and my just cause.”

The true chord was touched skilfully and boldly, and even now, at this distant interval of time, sovereigns may take a useful and generous lesson from the result.

I stood near her on that auspicious day, and while I did not wonder at the effects which her personal beauty and heroic spirit were well calculated to produce on the assembled Pala-

tines, I rejoiced to witness their enthusiastic fervour ; because I saw in it an additional claim on their part to the consideration of imperial justice, and an additional reason to prove that its concession was wise as well as generous ; and that its continuance would insure the loyalty which its timely yielding had so universally called forth. I may add, without much egotism, that every shout from the multitude—every gleam of the sabres that flashed widely from thousands of scabbards on every side, brought with them an additional sense of exultation to myself, because it confirmed me in the estimate I had formed of those who wielded them, and unmistakably proved that the bold and prompt measures which I had encouraged the Queen to take, were founded on correct observation, and a fair knowledge of the chivalrous people on whose principles I had recommended reliance to be placed.

From that day forth, the balance of fortune may be fairly said to have turned in my royal patroness's favor. Hungary rose almost *en masse*.

"We will die for our KING, Maria Theresa," was the exclamation of the noble in his palace, and the serf in his hovel; levies were made, answered, and organized with the speed of light; and as a first exhibition of their devotion to her service, old Count Palfy, whom the Queen honored with the name of "Father," marched to the relief of Vienna, with thirty thousand men.

Meanwhile, the Queen's other friends were fully active in her service. Count Nuperg was in Bohemia, at the head of twenty-thousand men; Kevenhuller defended the capital with twelve thousand; the Grand Duke and Prince Charles of Lorraine were at the head of a splendid force; Counts Berenclau and Traun were engaged in organizing and increasing

their troops, and all these active demonstrations so far awed the Elector, that, instead of besieging Vienna, he only invested Prague, which was taken by assault, but saved from destruction by the humanity of Count Saxe.

Of course it will be surmised that all these operations occupied a considerable time, and, in fact, months passed away, and the Queen remained still in Hungary, deeply engaged in superintending and promoting all the incidents of the campaign, whilst, as her confidential servant, I was the depository of her secrets, and often the friend to whom her most important resolutions were first made known. It was a glorious privilege, and, all the more welcome to me, because I felt that I had earned it honestly, and was incapable of using it ill.

But, as human happiness never comes without an alloy, I begun, amidst all my triumphs,

to have them overshadowed with a cloud, which, to my somewhat fertile imagination, seemed to grow larger and larger each succeeding day. My first great object, when the Queen's good fortune began to prevail, and matters, in consequence, settled down a little, was to establish a means of communication between the Milenka and myself. This, to me, was easy enough. Couriers and messengers were passing frequently between the Queen and her generals, and although intensely occupied, I always secured the half-hour that was sufficient to enable me to pour out to her whom I loved so well, the feelings of affectionate regard, which it was a relief and a pleasure for me to utter. It was equally easy for her to answer as for me to write, and for some time she did so with the utmost punctuality, and with the same openness and candor as my letters to her were couched.

Of course, she spoke frequently about

Kristan and his proceedings, and amused me more than once by describing his added self-importance, and in depicting, for me, his love of display, his fantastic foppery, his swaggering, self-sufficient air, his addiction to good living, and his anxiety to sink his former pursuits and position, and to flutter forth a butterfly of fashion, warmed into life by the favor of princes, and deserving of their smiles.

Latterly, however, the tone of the young girl's letters had changed. They were briefer, less cheerful, more guarded, and concise. The Duke of Lorraine had quitted Vienna and left Kristan behind, and the latter was now living in the same house with her, and Abraham Braun. She did not positively say that he had been dismissed from the Duke's service, but it was evident, from the context, that he deserved to be so treated. She glanced at his irregularities—his late hours—his evil choice of companions—and his occasional intrusion of

them upon their retirement, causing a serious interruption to her studies, and unpleasantly occupying much of her time. She had remonstrated with him, she said, but he had taken her remonstrance in bad part, and had persisted in his habits, and, by his pertinacity, rendered it almost impossible for her to avoid witnessing their exhibition. All this made me seriously uneasy.

I had no faith whatsoever in Kristan's honesty, honor, or regard to any law, save that of his own will.

Having seen him placed in a position so far above his expectations, I had indulged in a reasonable hope that his own prudence would prompt him to keep and deserve it. But the Kristans of the world are not to be regulated by the rules of prudence ; and fortune, when she confers her favors on a vicious fool, is always sure to have reason to repent her choice.

To a certain extent, he had gained a reputation which he had done but little to deserve, and amidst the license which prevailed in the troubled capital, he was likely, of course, to find extravagant and careless spirits like himself, who would foster his general turn for irregularity, and even tempt him into greater. I took it for granted, that this was pretty much his case, at present, and I suspected that the Duke, his master, although not wishing to dismiss him in disgrace, might have quietly given him leave to absent himself, and possibly had allowed his pay to go on, as a reward for former services, without asking or expecting him to perform any duty, in order to earn it.

I had written to him frequently and pressingly, and although he had answered my letters, at first readily and cheerfully enough, latterly I had not received from him a single line.

During the latter part of our correspondence,

he had affected to be a little displeased with my continued tone of warning, caused as that warning had been, by his obvious disposition to flatter himself into a belief that he was a personage of some importance, and deserving of more; and, at length, he had hinted to me that if I thought of him only as a subject, who required to be cautiously remembered of his duty, in order to insure his performance of it, the less we had to say to each other the better.

From the date of this gracious epistle to me it was, that his systematic silence had commenced, and although I had, since that, peremptorily demanded a rejoinder, still that rejoinder had never arrived.

Coupling all this with the cautions and apprehensive tone of the Milenka's letters, as I now received them, I became seriously agitated and uneasy, and, at length, in a paroxysm of impatience, I submitted the whole of my case to the consideration of my gracious mistress, and earnestly craved permission of her to

return to Vienna, were it but for a single day. This wish of mine was at once conceded to me in such terms as increased for her my gratitude and veneration.

“Harassed as I have been with my own difficulties and sources of anxious thought,” she said to me, “I have been, perhaps, too regardless of the fate and fortunes of your young and innocent friend. In requesting you to become my servant, I should have remembered that I deprived her of her best protector—almost of her only friend, and as the only reparation I can make to you both, I commission you to invite her hither as her sovereign’s guest, and to assure her of my friendship, countenance, and support. I hope you will find her well.”

It was evening when this gracious assurance and permission were given me, and without wasting a moment, I flew to my own apartment, to make a hasty preparation for my de-

parture at the first blush of morning, on the subsequent day. Never shall I forget the object that astounded me as I crossed the threshold.

At first I almost doubted my senses, and thought that my fears had taken a palpable form, and conjured up a spirit.

There—in the middle of the chamber—stood the shadow rather than the substance of Abraham Braun, with pale cheeks, streaming eyes, and clasped hands, in an attitude of the most abject terror and supplication. Misfortune and misery were stamped upon every line of his livid features, and my sudden appearance added to his agitation, and rendered him almost incapable of speech. Travel-stained and miserably draggled he was too, and if he had not embodied a whole host of fears in his own person, I might have enjoyed a smile at his expense.

I knew him too well not to be aware that

any sudden outbreak, on my part, would render him still more incapable of explanation. Almost maddened with fear and suspense as I was, I had still presence of mind sufficient to restrain myself. I even poured out for him a goblet of light wine, some of which chanced to stand on a side table, and to take one of his hands in mine, as I offered him the glass with the other.

"Sit down — drink this — and compose yourself before you speak." said I to him quietly.

"I—I cannot drink it—it would choke me, Gerald," he said, as he reeled to a chair, and covering his face with his hands, burst into an agony of weeping.

I advanced to him and took his hand again. It was burning and fevered.

"Do not touch me, Gerald," he said, shrinking away from my touch; "do not treat me kindly or it will kill me. I have

neglected my trust—disobeyed your express commands —”

“Then she is not *dead*?” exclaimed I, hastily, relieved for the moment from my most terrible fears, which had coupled his wretched appearance with the coffin-lid of my beautiful dove.

“Dead! no—I—I hope not,” he replied, looking up in amazement at the unexpected question. “Dead! No—no—not dead, Gerald; but—” and again he sunk his head upon his hand, and gave way to another burst of hysteric tears.

I waited again for a minute or two before I addressed him, and then I endeavoured to school my heart to patience, while every fibre of it beat as if it would burst my bosom. I knew the person I had to deal with, however, and I deliberately took a turn or two up and down the room before I again spoke.

"My good friend," I said to him at last, in tones as calm as I could command, "your appearance here proves to me that something wrong has happened. Let the evil be of what nature it may, it is necessary I should hear, in order that I may endeavour to rectify it. Compose yourself, therefore, and as you have travelled far to tell your story, pray endeavour to recal your ideas and regulate your thoughts, and let it be told as plainly, briefly, and to the point, as possible. Stay," I went on, as I perceived from his helpless and half-idiotic look, that anything like a consecutive narrative was not to be expected from him in his present excited state; "listen to me, and answer me just such questions as I shall ask you, and no more."

"I will, Gerald—I will," he answered, nervously. "Kill me, if you please, at the end, for I deserve it; but I will answer you as truly as if I stood in the presence of my God."

"First, then, answer me this," said I, slowly." "Is Kristan—"

"Look, Zenco—Gerald—" he said, suddenly, as if the name had given him a clue, and found him in speech at the same time; "we were well and happy until that terrible man returned to us—we were indeed. The dear child occupied herself with her books, her music, her flowers, and I, Gerald, I was only too happy to watch her innocent ways, to assist her when I could, and to talk over your goodness, and bless God, with her, that had raised up to her such a friend as you had always proved to be."

"This was until Kristan returned to you?" I said, recalling him to the thread of his story.

"Ah! yes; when he returned home to us, which he did when the Grand Duke left Vienna, all seemed from that moment to go wrong, Gerald. He had money and wished to

spend it, and although we gave him the best advice we could, he did not listen to it much—and at length he began to be angry with us for giving it. Nay, Gerald, he sometimes laughed at me when I counselled him, and once he even struck me—”

“Struck you?”

“But he was not sober at the time, you will understand,” said the poor fellow, deprecatingly. “It was when I would have prevented him from forcing the Milenka to go abroad with him, for, at last, he proceeded so far as to oblige her to appear in public with him, although she did not wish to do so, as you objected to it, and wished her to live in private until your return.”

“Did you go with them?”

“At first, yes—but not latterly,” he answered.

“And wherefore not?”

“It was his fault, not mine, I assure you,”

said he, with great *naïvete*. "He said that I—that I was not fit to be seen, in fact, Gerald—that I was awkward, and old, and got them laughed at whenever they appeared in public with me in their train."

"And what said the Milenka to that?" I enquired.

"Wept, dear heart—she wept and trembled—but still his violent ways frightened her into compliance," said Abraham. "I am almost ashamed to confess that it terrified me, also—at least," he went on, correcting himself, "it caused me to remain at home when I should not have done so. I was a coward, I fear, Gerald—yes, I own it, I was—I must have been an egregious coward, or I should have braved his anger, and whithersoever she went there should I have been found also."

"And where was it his custom to take her when they went abroad?" I asked.

"To theatres—to singing houses—to the public gardens and public walks."

"And who were his companions?"

"Alas! I scarcely know, he had so many. They seemed to spring out of the earth, as it were," answered Abraham, "and were, like himself, idle, and fond of pleasure, and wine, and dissipation; like him, too, they all laughed at *me*. One, indeed, there was better—or, at least, more considerate in his manner than the rest, who sometimes took my part; but that, I suppose, was because the Milenka did so too."

"And who was he?"

"They called him Count Albert—I saw him once or twice years ago with you, Gerald."

"With me?"

"Yes, he was a son of the Black Baron, and—"

"Well—well—and what of *him*?" I demanded, anxiously.

"I could not well understand him, Gerald," said Abraham. "He was above the usual run of Kristan's intimates, and yet they appeared more intimate than any of the rest."

"How or where did Kristan meet with him?" I asked.

"I do not know—I cannot say," replied Abraham; "I have heard, indeed, that it was at a gambling table; and, when I used to defend the Count before Kristan's other friends, they only laughed at my simplicity, and told me that he was worse than all of them put together."

"Did not his father's misfortunes daunt him?" said I.

"I never heard him mention his father but once," said he; "and that was to call him a fool."

"Soh! Proceed."

"To me, however, he was always kind and considerate; but, as I said before, I suppose

that was because he saw that to annoy or gibe at me was to displease the Milenka."

"He knew her, then?"

"He did, Gerald—he did," responded Abraham, with a downcast, hesitating air. "At first, when he was introduced by Kristan, and came familiarly amongst us, I rather liked his society—for he was mild, and quiet, and pleasant of speech—and so did the Milenka, too."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed. He used to come frequently—sometimes with Kristan, and often when he was absent—and sit with us for hours together, chatting, reading, and singing, and often partaking of our meals."

"Was Kristan aware of this?"

"He was."

"And what did he say to it?"

"Laughed, Gerald—he laughed, and said that we should encourage him, as he was an

excellent fellow, and would, one day or other, have the power to serve us all materially."

"And you did so? You encouraged him?"

"What could we do, dear Gerald?" he said, plaintively. "To me he seemed docile, sober, affable, and always civil and considerate, while, to her—dear child—he won my heart by treating her with an attention almost as impressive as your own."

"And she?"

"She used to delight in his society and watch for his coming——"

"She loved him, then?" said I, impetuously.

"No, no, no—you mistake altogether," he answered, hastily. "When I said that she liked his society, I meant to say that it was only at first she did so. After that her manner changed, and so did her opinions too. I

thought this strange, and asked her the cause, and why she sought to avoid him—although it was hard to do that—almost impossible, indeed, since he was Kristan's friend, and seemed to treat our house as his own."

"What reasons did the Milenka give you for her change of manner?"

"She said that he was forward, bold, intrusive—although, I protest to you, Gerald, he never appeared so to me!"

"Doubtless. Well?"

"And, sometimes, when I happened to be absent—for frequently Kristan took me abroad and left them together—when I returned, I found her in tears."

"Go on."

"At last——"

He paused and looked at me with a glance of sorrow and self-reproach, that must have softened the hardest heart. It wrung mine, for I conjectured that it predicted evil tidings.

I smiled faintly, however, and, as well as I was able, encouraged him to proceed.

"At last," he went on, moodily, "Kristan insisted—I say *insisted*, Gerald, for the dear child would have refused him had she dared—insisted that she should accompany the count and him to a ball—a public ball, which was to be given by the municipality, on account of the victory of Prince Charles and the Grand Duke, over the Prussians."

"Well !"

"What shall I say, Gerald?" he went on, while his agitation of tone and manner became extreme. "I interfered, I beseeched, I prayed that she might be left at home—I even commanded, and I threatened to make you acquainted with his acts, although I could not hope much from that, as you had never answered my last letters, and Kristan knew that, and laughed in my face."

"Your last letters ! I never received them," said I.

"Never ! What then must you have thought of me ?" he said, looking still more terrified.

"It matters not now about that, or we will enquire into it afterwards," said I. "At present, tell me about this ball."

"Alas ! Gerald, they left our happy home to attend it, and I—I never saw them again."

"Never ?"

"Never—Oh, never !" was his piteous reply.

"And this Albert—this Count ?" said I.

"He called the next morning," replied Abraham, "and as he saw my great uneasiness, he told me that he was commissioned by Kristan to say that he and the Milenka were gone a little way into the country for re-

creation, and that, in a few days, they would return."

"And you believed him?" said I, bitterly.

"I was distracted, Gerald—and knew not what to believe or what to do," replied he, simply. "But after the Count was gone, I became more uneasy—more alarmed. I could not trust Kristan or his friends—I did not like the manner of the Count, and I remembered that the Milenka had latterly distrusted and disliked him; so, after wandering about for that day, I did, what, doubtless, I should have done at first—and knowing Count Nugent to be your friend, I ventured to wait on him and solicit his advice."

"And what said he?"

"Cursed me, Gerald—swore at me awfully, for not going to him at once," replied he, raising up his hand at the recollection of the old warrior's rating, "and when he had expended

all his anger on me, he then desired me to come hither as fast as I could travel, in the hope, as he said, that you would cut my throat, as a proper payment for my negligence and stupidity. I care not if you do, Gerald," he went on, "for I feel that I deserve death for my disregard of your injunctions."

He fell at my feet as he spoke, and, in the utter prostration of his spirit, I dare say he would have welcomed the stroke that was to end, at once, his remorse and his fears.

I raised the poor afflicted fellow from his posture of humility, and after a few words of comfort, forgiveness, and encouragement, he was sufficiently re-assured and composed to give me the particulars of what I wanted to know.

From what I heard, I surmised that Kristan's new friend, Count Albert, had formed an attachment to the Milenka, and having been

repulsed by her, had projected, with the unscrupulous conjurer, a *ruse* to remove her from under the eye of the uncouth but faithful guardian, in order to terrify her into compliance with his views. That the young and dissipated noble intended to *marry* her, I could not but seriously doubt, as, although beautiful and innocent, she was poor ; but, on the other hand, I hesitated to believe in the utter depravity of Kristan, in sanctioning any other arrangement—or rather, I trusted to his fears of me, should he do so. Still, it was evident, from the course he had pursued, that his fear of my anger had been superseded by some more urgent temptation ; and now, fully alive as he must be, to the danger he had incurred from my vengeance, I dreaded that he would so enshroud himself, as to make all my plans for his detection inoperative.

What Count Albert's resources might be, I knew not, although, as his father's estates

were now under *surveillance*, if not as yet confiscated to the crown, by their owner's treason, I took it for granted, that the young man's means must be circumscribed ; but he might have wealth at his command which I knew nothing of, or he might be a successful gambler, and thus provide ill-gotten gold to spend in worse devised schemes ; at all events, he must be the tempter and co-partner of Kristan's present iniquity ; and solemnly did I pledge myself that be their schemes or resources what they might, they should not foil my vengeance or deprive me of the gratification of punishing the base wrongers of the orphan girl, if I could not save her from their machinations. It cost me much, calmly to think over the possible insult and outrage to which she might be exposed ; but I resolutely fixed my mind upon one result, and prayed to God that despair might not impair my judgment, and thus deprive her of a chance of protection

and restoration, when she most required it.

When the grief-stricken traveller had told me all he knew, I bade him refresh himself while I was absent, and procured him the means of doing so, and turned away from his vehement protestations of gratitude for my unexpected kindness, I once more flew to the feet of my royal mistress, and informed her of this new source of sorrow, as an excuse for my lengthened absence, should I be obliged, by the nature of my proceedings, to delay my return to my duties longer than I had originally stipulated to do.

“It is a new call upon your prudence as well as upon your courage, Gerald,” she said to me, kindly, “and while I give you unlimited power over your own time, I am bound, in gratitude, to aid you to the utmost of my ability, in order that it may not be mis-spent.”

She drew over her writing materials as she spoke, and hastily penned a few lines upon a sheet of paper, which she then folded and delivered to me.

“Here is an order under our sign manual, to all the authorities under our command, to assist you in your search,” she said, “and to place, at your disposal, whatever force you may require. This purse of gold will be useful in quickening the activity of the tardy, and even in stimulating the efforts of those who are well disposed. Do not hesitate to accept it, Gerald,” she added, with a smile; “you are the friend, as well as the servant of your Queen, and I trust that the day never will arrive when the heart of Maria Theresa will be closed to claims so legitimate as yours. Farewell !”

Ah, yes ! she *was* a Sovereign to live or die for.

In less than an hour I was on the road to

Vienna, with poor Abraham Braun by my side. Even at this miserable moment, his society was a comfort to me, for we could speak of the Milenka.

CHAPTER VI.

CONJECTURES.

MY first visit, on my arrival in Vienna, was made to the retired residence, of which I had left the young Milenka, the happy and innocent inhabitant. I knew that there was little positive utility in going thither, and yet I could not forbear doing so.

I was conducted through the rooms by the disconsolate Abraham, whose bitter grief and self-accusation revived as every memorial of her who was now lost to him presented them-

selves. Everything remained just as the poor girl had left it. A music-book stood open before a small harp which I had purchased for her; three or four books, which I had recommended her to study, were on the small table at which she was accustomed to sit; her birds fluttered in their cages, and seemed to miss her care; a bouquet of half-faded flowers drooped in a vase—every object around and before me told of her previous presence, and reminded me of her absence; and whilst I saw that every wish and recommendation of mine had been scrupulously attended to, it added a deeper pang to my feeling of self-reproach, for having allowed myself to be tempted to leave her, or for my not having been warned by all my previous knowledge of the scoundrel Kristan, to be more on my guard in ever sanctioning his presence near her again at all.

But regret or remorse was now equally

unavailing ; and with a sorrowful but, at the same time, a determined heart, I quitted the place, thus suddenly made desolate ; and at once betook myself for information, if not for consolation, to my friend the Count.

To say the truth, I reckoned but little on his sympathy—although a good deal on his support. I looked upon him as one whose gentler feelings had been hardened into the same metal as his sword, by the wild scenes and wilder license of the camp ; and who would back me as a friend much sooner than he would listen to me as a lover.

I was agreeably disappointed, however. He received me with fatherly cordiality, and heard my story from beginning to end without evincing either uneasiness or want of attention. On the contrary he appeared to be almost as much interested as myself.

“It is a bad business—a base outrage,” he

said, when I had ended; "and I agree with you that your own honor calls upon you to discover the object of it, and to punish the aggressor. For my own part, Gerald, I enter into your feelings, and have done so from the first. I have had all my eyes about me since your—I know not what to call him—that very extraordinary follower of yours was here."

"He *was* my tutor—recommended by yourself to my father, as I understood," said I; "and he *is* my friend—the most faithful and unsophisticated that ever man was blessed with. But what have you learned by your enquiries, Count?"

"Not a great deal, I am sorry to say," he answered; "and even that little is not satisfactory."

"Let me hear it, however."

"I have made considerable enquiry about this fellow, Kristan; in the first place, and from all I can hear, he is a confirmed

scoundrel, and has been running a race of utter profligacy, ever since the Grand Duke left the Capital, and committed him to his own dangerous keeping, with a tolerably well-filled purse, and a sort of semi-fashionable notoriety. Vanity and love of pleasure, as my agents inform me, have been his besetting sins ; and, like all fools, he has given way to them until they first betrayed and then ruined him. In the present disorganized state of the kingdom, its capital is little better than a den of infamy—a sort of receptacle, where rogues and ruffians of every hue consort together, to plunder the unwary first, and then to strip each other of their ill-got gains. This fellow of yours had the presumption to set up as master of the craft, and, in the long run, found himself a ruined wreck where he thought to become a false beacon to others. As long as he had money his comrades fleeced him, and one amongst them—the youngest, coolest,

noblest, and worst of them all—stuck to him night and day—for what reason I can now surmise—not only until every coin was gone, but until the rascally dupe was completely overwhelmed with debt, and utterly at his mercy.”

“You mean Count Albert, the son of the Black Baron,” said I.

“Black enough, faith, Gerald; and not a jot the whiter for having reared his son to be what he now is,” said the Count. “Yes, you have hit upon the very man. He is a clever fellow, too, in his way; and although everybody believed that he was deep in his precious father’s schemes, still he was too wise to appear openly; and, as there was no direct proof of his complicity, and his professions of loyalty were both loud and unequivocal, he was allowed to remain at large, and go unpunished, when lesser rogues suffered; although it was thought fit to deprive him of his commission—

ostensibly for his father's misdeeds, but, in reality, because his own were supposed to equal them. I am convinced this disgrace to our nobility is at the bottom of this piece of arch-villany, now in course of perpetration against your young friend; but, yet, there is one thing still puzzles me, Gerald. Kristan is not to be found—hardly to be traced; but yet this Count Albert stands his ground, and has never been absent from Vienna for a single day since the young creature disappeared. He lives openly in his father's mansion, which has been spared him; rides abroad, entertains his friends, gambles, drinks, and feasts as usual, and has never been missed from his usual haunts, although my agents have done their best to gather accurate information of his proceedings."

"There can be no doubt of his being the mover and main-spring of the deed, notwith-

standing," said I. "Of that I am as perfectly assured, as though I had heard the confession from his own lips. How far have you been enabled to trace the movements of Kristan?"

"Only a short way," was the reply. "About three leagues, or hardly that, on the great northern road--there my agents were completely baffled, for the scoundrel and his innocent victim seemed suddenly to have disappeared from the face of the earth, as if it had opened and swallowed them."

"Better for him it had done so, perhaps," said I; "but, cunning as he is, I shall find means to unearth him yet."

"In the meantime, what do you propose to do, Gerald?" demanded the Count.

"My first step will be to seek an interview with his employer," said I.

"But he will be sure to deny all knowledge

of Kristan or the girl, Gerald. Of that you may be perfectly assured."

"Let him," said I. "I will read his soul through his eyes, and five words with him, will tell me whether I am to brand him as a villain, or look upon him *only* as a profligate and the companion of profligates."

"Gadzooks! man, if that be so," replied the gallant old soldier, "you must take me with you as a second or arbitrator, as the case may be. The fellow has the reputation of a first-rate sworder, and is a notorious bully and fire-eater."

"He is a coward, for all that," said I, coolly, "and you shall hear me tell him so, if I see occasion for it. If you please to favor me with your company, I shall willingly accept you as my witness; but I honestly tell you beforehand, that, as an arbitrator, your services are likely to be thrown away."

"I will go with you, however," said he, hastily. "You must not want a friend at such a juncture, and I honor your spirit and good feeling too much either to object to your intention, or to think of deserting you, until one way or other, you are enabled to arrive at the truth."

"But I mean to go at once, Count," said I.

"Be it so," said he, cheerfully. "The sooner such an affair is got over the better, and if it should turn out that we are on the wrong scent, the earlier we discover our mistake, the sooner can we proceed to rectify it."

"Just so; but there is no mistake in the matter," said I.

"We shall see," replied he, laughing at the positive nature of my reply.

The house to which we proceeded, directed

by the Count, who had informed himself accurately about the young man's movements, through means of his official emissaries, was the very one in which I had my last interview with my mother. She had retired to the country, after her husband's arrest, and was understood to be in very precarious health, and now the mansion was solely inhabited by her step-son.

As we approached it, I announced my determination to the Count not to leave it without an interview with its present occupant, if possible ; and while he applauded my resolution, he suggested a course by which the object I sought might be soonest obtained.

"Let him be informed, in the first instance," said he, "that it is *I* who desire to see him. He is playing a dexterous game, and as he evidently wishes to screen himself by a manifestation of innocence, he will scarcely

hazard a denial to me, although he might be less punctilious with you."

"Let him, if he dare," said I; "but be it as you will, Count. Only when he does favor us with his presence, you will be good enough to give me the lead, and let the interrogatories proceed from me."

"With all my heart, Gerald," answered he, laughing. "I am ready to admit that you will be more likely to get correct information out of him than I should be; for if he talked plausibly, I might be inclined to credit him, and if, on the contrary, he prevaricated or mounted the high horse, I should be likely to lose my temper and fly at his throat at once."

When we arrived at the door, and as soon as our demand for admittance was answered, we were told by the servant that his master was at dinner, and that some friends were with him.

"My business with your master is imperative," was the Count's reply; "let your master be told so, sir, and that I will await his leisure here, as I cannot go home without seeing him."

"I am afraid, sir," replied the man civilly enough, "that I dare not deliver your message, as my lord's commands are peremptory."

"Then, by your leave, I will deliver it myself," said the Count. "Shew me the room in which your master entertains his guests, and I will do the rest myself."

"I dare not venture to do that either, my lord," replied the servant, puzzled at the Count's pertinacity; "but as you are so pressing, I will deliver your message, and the terms on which I have consented to receive it."

"Do as you please, only be quick about it," was the reply.

"If you will be good enough to rest a mo-

ment in this room," said the man, throwing open a door to the right of where we now stood, "I will return to you with my master's answer immediately."

CHAPTER VII.

COUNT ALBERT.

“I WONDER what will be the upshot of all this, Gerald,” said the old Count, glancing curiously round the room into which we had been ushered, and the walls of which were somewhat theatrically hung round with weapons of various sorts—swords, spears, daggers, tomahawks, and fire-arms of different length, make, and calibre. “This is the Count’s

armoury, I presume," he went on, continuing a survey of matters so much to his taste, "and he makes this ostentatious display, I suppose, in order to give a civil hint to the beholders of the warlike propensities of their owner. I give you my honor, Gerald, that I am always a little inclined to doubt the readiness of a man to handle his weapons who makes so great a parade of them. A single sword is always enough for me, and if I can wield it well when I am called upon by my honor or duty to do so, I am amply satisfied. Now, sir, what says your master to my request?" he went on, seeing that the door again opened as he spoke.

"He is here to answer for himself, Count," replied a young man, handsome, tall, well made, and with a certain air of bavardage, almost amounting to effrontery, in his air and manner. He closed the door, and advanced into the room as he spoke.

"Let me hope," he continued, in what I may call a tone of forced good humour, "either that your business can be briefly despatched, or that you can postpone it until to-morrow, as I am now particularly engaged, and with a less respected visitor I should have declined an interview to-night."

"It is with me, Count Albert," said I, coming forward, "that your business lies at present, and it is to answer my questions that you have been sent for here."

He started a little when he first saw me and heard my voice, but after a single moment, he endeavoured to throw an air of supercilious indifference into his voice and features, as he replied to my challenge.

"Well, sir," he said, "and who are you? and what is your demand upon me?"

There was an oscillation, if I may so term it, in his utterance, and an indirectness in his regard — for after meeting my eye firmly

enough for a moment, he affected to turn it elsewhere—which satisfied me, not only that he remembered my person, but also that he well knew upon what business I was there.

“Let me premise the demand I shall have to make upon you, Count,” said I, “by hoping that you will not again think it necessary to require that I should announce myself, as I can perceive that your recollection of my person is each moment becoming more distinct and palpable.”

“You happen to be greatly mistaken, sir,” replied he, haughtily and coldly, “as I am not conscious that I ever saw you before.”

“Let it be so,” said I, calmly; “my memory is better than yours, it seems, for I remember you well. My name, then, is Nugent—Gerald Nugent, and my present business is to inquire after the fate of a young female, called the Milenka, who was known to your

lordship, and who has suddenly disappeared from Vienna."

"Surely, sir, you are not serious in your demand?" said he, in a half-jeering tone. "You cannot be exacting enough to fancy that I can answer for the acts or movements of every young lady with whom I happen to have a slight acquaintance."

"In the first place, my lord," said I, as coolly as before, "your acquaintance with the girl was not a slight one; for I have evidence to prove that you wished to be on much more intimate terms with her than she desired that you should; and, in the second place, it is certain that you *have*, in some degree, answered for her acts and movements already, inasmuch as you assured the man, called Abraham Braun, that she would return to Vienna in two or three days."

His colour heightened a little, but his

voice kept its tone of indifference, as he answered—

“I may have made some random assertion of the kind ; probably, to relieve the man’s mind, possibly to get rid of his importunities.”

“So far then your own admissions are at issue with your former declarations,” said I. “Let me entreat you to tax your memory again, and it may enable you to follow this villain and his confederates to their resting-place, and tell us where we are to look for them.”

“You have had my answer, sir,” was his response.

“I am to understand, then, that you decline to inform me where the victim of this cowardly and most unmanly outrage is concealed ?” said I.

“Your extravagant question is an assumption that I could do so if I pleased,” he re-

plied; "to that I have no further answer to give."

"She disappeared in company with a man whose acquaintance, I presume, you will not also disclaim!" I persisted.

"I knew but little of the fellow, save in a general way," he answered.

"You visited daily at his residence," said I, "walked with him, talked with him, sat at his table, ate of his meat, drank of his cup, humoured his fancies, and won his money—these acts, I must remind you, are those of a familiar and a friend, and not the mere casual courtesies of a passing acquaintance."

"Sir, you mistake," said he, with an habitual sneer; "all this may be done, and is done, in society, every day, without the actors being pledged to that kind of sentiment which you call friendship. The man you speak of

was an amusing vagabond, in his way ; he had been a stroller and a mountebank, and had the tricks of the one, and the buffoonery of the other ; and as he amused me for the hour, I suffered him to hang about me, and to become more familiar with me than I ought to have done. But of his private affairs or proceedings I know nothing."

"He is largely in your debt, however !" I said.

"You are misinformed on that point, as well as in others," answered he, hastily ; "he owes me nothing."

"This candid declaration, so freely made before witnesses, may be of use to him hereafter," said I, turning partly to the Count. "Meanwhile, my lord," I went on, still more gravely, "I am led to believe that you are not only cognizant of his present residence, but that you were also the adviser of his flight."

"Sir, the supposition insults me," he said, in his haughtiest and most defiant tone.

"I cannot help it, my lord," was my equable reply. "If telling you what I believe to be a truth happen to include an insult, also, I cannot gainsay my honest belief in order to spare the nerves or avert the frowns of any man."

"You can, at least, answer for the consequences of having slandered an honorable one," said he, with a lowering brow, which destroyed his beauty, and reminded me of the Black Baron, at once.

"I am always ready to abide the consequences of my own deliberate acts," said I.

"Not in your own proper person, I presume?" said he, casting upon me a look of ineffable scorn, or what he meant should stand for one.

"Even so, my lord Count," I replied, still

perfectly unmoved at his sarcastic taunt. “*I* never act by deputy, whether it be to offer an outrage, or to answer a challenge. What I dare conceive in thought, I dare perform in act, despite of all the world. What I think proper to assert is always spoken at my own hazard, and I call that man, heart and soul, a craven, who seeks to relieve himself of responsibility to me at the cheap outlay of a sneer at my person. I offer to your lordship this commentary and explanation, as your question seemed to invite it, and having done so, I once again recur to the object of my visit. I now demand from you a categorical answer to a plain question.”

“You shall have no answer from me to any question your insolence may demand,” said he, fiercely. “Your mind seems to be as contorted as your body, and I warn you, that although I have borne your rudeness of speech hitherto, in pity to your deformity, my

patience has a limit, and I cannot answer for my forbearance, should your insolence continue."

"You forget that you speak to a Nugent and a gentleman," broke in the fiery old soldier, now interfering for the first time.

"I feel that I am addressing an evil minded and ill mannered dwarf, sir," was the uncere-
monious reply.

"All this is beside the question, gentlemen," interposed I, interrupting the Count, who was about to make a very angry reply.

"My business here is specific, and if a quarrel be forced upon me as a consequence of requiring an Austrian noble, to whom honor and life should be of equal value, to answer a plain question couched in civil terms, I trust I shall find a way to defend myself, even though I may want those personal graces which my assailant possesses."

"Sir, you mistake the case altogether, or you misapprehend it," replied the young Count. "I refused to answer an imputation, not a question. You accuse me of a crime—"

"Pardon me, my lord," interrupted I; "I accuse you of nothing. I state to you, candidly and honestly, as I am bound to do, that others, rather than myself, for I was unhappily absent from Vienna—accuse you of complicity in a very serious outrage, which no man of common humanity would either perpetrate or countenance, and if you be really innocent, it is your bounden duty, not alone to deny the charge, but to aid me in placing upon the real criminal the stigma he deserves, and assist me to consign him to that punishment which he so well deserves. Once more, then, I ask you, in presence of my relative and friend, Count Nugent, whose name and reputation are guarantees of his high honor and

good faith, whether you are cognisant of the past proceedings of the man called Kristan, and whether his present residence is known to you ?”

“I have no reply to give to such absurd questions,” he said, in a contemptuously careless tone, which rang hollow to my ear, for all that. “If you have been injured, I suppose redress is open to you, without my assistance ; and if an individual has inflicted the injury, I presume he is to be found, and to judge by your exhibition of spirit, you are the person most competent to set out in search of him. As to myself, you are a stranger to me, and I will not have my name mixed up with such proceedings at all. You seem to be an intractable person, who having once got a crotchet into his head, does not care hastily to part with it ; but I warn you once more that the danger of such a course is more obvious than

the utility, as so doing can be of no service to your cause, while I shall exact from you a heavy penalty for an unpardonable transgression."

"It shall be paid, my lord, when and where you please," said I, boldly. "In this whole matter you have stooped to equivocate, though you did not dare to deny, and if I ever had a doubt of your share of this transaction, your conduct has removed it. I believe you to be a criminal, and I shall not hesitate to denounce you as one. You have given me a warning—let me repay you by another. The young female who has been the object of this gross outrage is under my protection; I am bound to her by ties and feelings, the nature and extent of which you can neither conceive nor appreciate. I do not value my life a single pin's point, when put in competition with her safety and honor; and I do not hesitate to tell

you that so long as a breath of that life remains to me, it shall be devoted to her cause and to her restoration. Do not believe that this meeting will be our last, my lord," I continued, looking him steadily in the face. "Years ago, while you were yet a boy, I gave you my opinion of what you would one day become; I am now satisfied of the justice of my prediction, and it is for you to look to the result, for it will behove you. Fate and crime have made me the enemy of your house. I have degraded the father—I shall live to trample on the son."

With a gesture as imperious as if I were a giant, armed by destiny itself, with omnipotent power, I pantomimed the action with my foot, and then turned on my heel and left the room, unquestioned and unchallenged, although I hardly expected to do so. I was closely followed by Count Nugent, who saw the

extraordinary impression I had made, and did not care to lessen it by a single word of his own. He compensated himself for his enforced silence however, as we returned to his quarters.

“What think you of our interview, Count?” I demanded, soon after we had entered the vehicle which had brought us.

“The fellow is a villain and a craven both, Gerald,” was his unhesitating reply. “I watched him closely—Good sooth! you left me nothing else to do—and I aver to you my firm belief that he has neither honor nor conscience, or even true courage to back him out in his want of them. He quailed at your look, and trembled at your words—I could see that, through all the hypocritical colouring with which he treated them. But the poison of an adder is not the less to be dreaded, because the venomous reptile dreads the day. The ques-

tion is not what he is, but what you are to do?"

"You can spare me a guard?"

"A troop—a regiment, if you will, man," he answered readily. "You are a Nugent, and I will give you twenty picked men of the name from my own musters, some of them from the banks of the Shannon, and some who have never seen that noble river, but every man of whom will follow you to the gates of —, ahem? you understand me, Gerald."

"And you can assist me to procure an authority to enter and to search any house to which my suspicions may lead me?" I again enquired.

"The Queen's sign manual will provide you all you want, and that you have already in your pouch," he said. "Who dare gainsay it, or hesitate to obey what it gives warrant for? But what do you intend? May I share your

council? I am an old soldier, you know—used to sieges, battles, ambuscades, and so forth, and if think my advice can be of use, or consider my personal assistance necessary, do not scruple to tell me so at once. You are a gallant fellow, and on this occasion you shall command me, as if I were a drumboy.”

“A thousand thanks, my dear Count,” said I, gratefully, for I felt that the gallant old man offered nothing more or less than he meant to perform. “At present, however, the quieter my proceedings are conducted, the better chance will they have of ultimate success.”

“May I hear them? You will require to act with caution, for you have a wily and unscrupulous enemy to deal with, I can tell you,” said he, anxiously.

“I am aware of it,” replied I, “and I mean

to hazard no more than I can help—not for my own sake, but for hers whose restoration and welfare are the objects of my life. My plan is a plain one. It is evident to me, in the first place, that this, Count, is the mainspring and principal promoter of the diabolical attempt which we are now to remedy—of that I have no doubt whatever.”

“Nor I, by Jupiter! I will swear to it,” said he. “He did not dare to disclaim it in positive terms. A man of honor or truth—nay, a clever rogue, faith! would have gone the whole length or none. But he has not the spirit to be wholly a scoundrel. He fenced with your questions, and shirked without answering them—I gave him up when I heard him do that. I set him down as a poltroon as well as a villain. But I interrupted you. Go on—I will not do so again if I can.”

“His plans have been well laid and long

thought over," said I, "that is sufficiently obvious; and his victims—for Kristan is not the less his victim because he has become first his dupe and then his tool—have not been removed beyond his reach."

"You think so?"

"I am certain of it," said I. "He remains for the present in Vienna, to hoodwink the inquiries which, he took it for granted, would not fail to be made."

"Possible enough. But where then are *they*—that is the main point, Gerald? They were certainly traced for some distance on the road to the north, as I told you, but then again, all traces were suddenly lost of them."

"I will try and recover the clue, however," said I. "His father's Castle of Erlsfurth, long disused and partly dismantled, stands, if not directly, in the line of the northern road—"

"Aye?"

"At least sufficiently near to it to render it the probable direction in which the fugitives have vanished."

"Likely enough, egad!"

"It contains a labyrinth of chambers and passages which might well puzzle a less curious eye than mine, Count."

"You have been in it—you know it, then? Stay—stop! Did not your father's house—that in which you were reared—stand somewhere in its neighbourhood?"

"You are right, sir; I have not been in the Castle for years, but yet I am as familiar with every nook and cranny of it as I am with my own hand. I have roamed through its half-ruined chambers, day and night, for months, thinking thoughts and dreaming dreams, some of which, at least, have been realized," said I.

"Well, Gerald! and you think this castle contains the Milenka?" he said. "It looks feasible enough—you have a keen scent, and would make a capital flag of truce. It stands within easy distance of the capital, is a secure retreat until enquiry blows over, and then he can visit it, occasionally, at his leisure. Yes, yes, that must be the ground for our first operations. You will look for her there—ha?"

"I will stand before its door by midnight," said I; "that is, if you, Count, can give me your promised assistance at once. A dozen resolute men will be amply sufficient."

"And they can be got into their saddles in ten minutes—you shall have them—they will be at your orders at the first tap of the drum, the first blast of the bugle, man," he said, heartily. "But if you mean to go to-night, you must grant me a favor, Gerald."

"Willingly, my dear Count. What is it?"

"Take me along with you."

"For what?"

"My presence, I foresee, will be useful as a witness, if not as a safeguard," he replied. "I am better known than you are, and the entrance which might be safely be refused to plain Gerald Nugent, could not be so easily postponed to a general and Count of the same name. Moreover, my dear fellow, my feelings are engaged in this matter, and I should be like a fish out of water, roaming from chamber to chamber the live long night, until I heard how your expedition succeeds."

"I did not wish to trouble you so far," I replied; "but I am bound to defer to your wishes, and I shall be proud to have so honorable a witness of what I may be compelled to

do in case of necessity, as from the character of Count Albert, I think it possible that he may have followers and adherents as desperate and unprincipled as himself."

"Not unlikely, Gerald," said the old man, warming up. "Who knows but he may join them too, if our visit has alarmed him, and he thinks you on the alert! Ods'heart, man, it may be a regular skirmish—with glory to be gained, tyrants to be discomfitted, and captive maidens released! My blood begins to tingle at the thought of it!"

I suffered him to run on at this rate, as he pleased, while my own plans were formed in silence.

The more I thought over the matter, the more firmly assured was I that Kristan and the Milenka were to be found concealed somewhere within the precincts of the old walls, every crevice almost of which was so well

known to me ; and as I conceived it possible enough that Count Albert would take the alarm, and either remove the persons of whom I was in search, or provide additional defences, in case of an approach such as I meditated, I determined, if possible, to be beforehand with him.

In the furtherance of this resolution, I was cordially seconded by Count Nugent, whose orders were instantly given, and as immediately responded to.

Twelve picked men, commanded by an officer, were paraded for duty, and, by my wish, each pair took different paths, with particular directions to take note of what they saw on the route, and to meet the Count and myself at a spot indicated, within three leagues of the city, or rather less, being, in fact, the boundary of the castle domain.

When the last individuals of this party

had departed, the Count and I mounted horses provided for us, and attended by a single orderly, not in uniform, we set out on our expedition.

CHAPTER VIII.

I RE-VISIT THE CASILE OF ERLSFURTH.

It was between eight and nine o'clock, when we passed through the barrier gate, and the Count stopped for a moment to question the officer in charge, as to the number and sort of persons who had lately passed, while I rode on.

When he rejoined me, he said—

“All right as yet, Gerald ; we have got the

start of the enemy, at all events, as no person answering his description has passed the gate since nightfall."

The night was moonless, but otherwise bright with stars, which studded the whole sky, and rendered the road sufficiently clear to enable us to ride rapidly on.

We had reached a small hamlet, about half-way, and were walking our horses quietly through its long street, in order to avoid the appearance of haste, when the clatter of a carriage, or some other vehicle, rapidly driven, caught my ear, and, at my instance, we had barely time to draw within the shelter of a court or yard, the door of which was open, when a post-coach, drawn by four horses, and driven by two postillions, passed furiously on. Behind it, clustered three men, if not more, and although it was too dark to distinguish persons, my doubts as to individuality were dispelled, before the sound of the carriage

wheels had ceased, by the random observations of two men, of the peasant class, who entered the yard at the moment.

"Aye, aye, Henrick, the young Count it is, no less," said one in answer to the other. "There will be wild doings at the Castle to-night, I'll warrant you. Whenever he has any particular devilment in hand—such as to win a friend's money, or bamboozle a woman that loves him too well—the old walls are sure to come in as part of the play. The blood of the Black Baron will never sink into the ground; while he lives to uphold it, at all events—ha, ha, ha!"

They strolled on into the back door of the house of which the yard made part, and were speedily beyond hearing.

We had heard quite enough, however, to let us know that our suspicions, in all probability, were right, and that instead of spending the evening with his friends in Vienna, the

young Count was now speeding to the castle to remove or secure his prisoner, for such the Milenka might be considered to have become.

"You have put him on his mettle, however," said the Count, as we hastened on; "and it is well we took time by the forelock, or the rascal might have given us the slip, after all."

"He must be made of good mettle, indeed, if he baffles me," said I. "I have that within my heart which would enable me to follow him to the furthest ends of the earth. But it is better as it is. Let us ride, Count."

When, at length, we arrived at our appointed place of meeting, we found eight of the men there already, and in a very few minutes more the others rode hastily up.

As all my plans were ready formed, instead of demanding an entrance at any of the gate-offices

of the castle, I led my little troupe a *détour*, and skirting the boundary-wall, until we came to an angle, we kept to the left, and in a quarter of an hour found, as I expected, that the wall terminated, and that the further boundary was simply a dry ditch.

To find a mode of crossing this was easy work to men accustomed to the exigencies of a campaign, and who used their swords with the same dexterity that a pioneer does his axe; and when we mustered our troop within the enclosure, I headed the force, while Count Nugent rode by my side; and thus, in marching order, we boldly approached the front door of the mansion—the path to which I remembered as well as though I had trodden it the day before.

When we drew up before it, I glanced along the front and saw that all was dark and silent—not a sound to be heard, not a light to be

seen ; although, on directing one or two of the troopers to alight and inspect the ground, they were able to detect the recent marks of wheels on the esplanade, by following them with their fingers on the soft ground.

Still, however, as our approach had either not been heard, or was not attended to, I alighted myself, ascended the flight of broad stone steps, and knocked loudly at the door.

“There are none so deaf as those who will not hear,” said the Count, after I had applied for admittance three or four times ; “try them once more, Gerald, and if that won’t do, we’ll try what main force and willing hearts will, in the name of God and the Queen.”

Again I thundered at the door, and, as if the inmates had heard the Count’s threat, a small window, directly above the door, was cautiously opened, and a male voice, tremulous

from age or fear apparently, enquired who we were and what we wanted there at that unseasonable hour of the night.

"We require admittance, instantly," said I ;
"so come down and let us in."

"I dare not admit strangers at this hour of the night, sir," replied the seneschal. "My orders are very particular on this point. So you must come again to-morrow, and I wish you a very good night."

"Stop, sirrah," broke in the Count, as the head of the speaker was about to withdraw. "We are here on business of the State ; and I, Count Nugent, require you to open the door, on the warrant of her Majesty the Queen."

"Alack ! gentlemen, I know nothing about warrants," was the reply. "My lord is absent, and I am left in charge of the property which is in the castle. You may be very honest, but then you may be very much the

reverse, and I must have day-light to see your faces, before I venture to let you inside of any house which I have the care of."

"Take care what you do, sir," replied the Count. "We have force sufficient to make our way, whether you like it or not; and I give you full notice that I will shoot you through the head, like a dog, with my own hand, if you oblige us to storm your stronghold."

"If you are a gentleman and a soldier, sir," said the voice, "you will hardly murder a man for doing his duty. Call as early as you please to-morrow, and every door in the Castle shall be opened for you, but I could not answer to my conscience for admitting you to-night."

So saying, he closed the window, and retreated, leaving the angry Count to storm and threaten as he pleased.

On my own part, however, I was somewhat prepared for this sort of reception. I took it for granted that we were not likely to gain admittance, without the exercise of either force or ingenuity, and as I also took it for granted that some preparation had been made to withstand the former, I resolved to try the latter.

We held a hasty consultation, therefore, and while I left the Count occupied in ostentatiously battering at the door, and trying some of the lower windows, which were securely barred, I selected four men, the youngest and lithest of the troop, and gliding away in the darkness, I led them to the east wing of the Castle, and, in a few minutes, stood beneath an over-grown walnut-tree, the fruit of which I had often reached and appropriated, in my younger days, by creeping through a small circular window, which stood immediately

behind the mid-branches of the tree, and swinging myself into one of its forks.

As this window stood in that part of the mansion, which used to be totally uninhabited, partly from the ruinous state of its chambers, and partly because certain spectral appearances were said to be connected with it—I had a reasonable hope that however other points of approach might be attended to, this sequestered spot had been overlooked.

In this trust, I prepared to ascend the tree, and advised my followers to disencumber themselves of their heavy boots, in order to follow my example. Had I desired them to doff any other article of their attire, I believe they would have done so without scruple or hesitation, so that they were permitted to retain their weapons, and having seen them cast themselves free of their tremendous encasements, I clasped the boll of the tree, and by a

few efforts, rendered easy enough to me by the strength of my arms and long practice in using them, I stood opposite the casement, and cautiously commenced my *réconnaissance* of the interior.

So far as I could discover, all was silent and secure within ; but before I gave the word for my assistants to follow me, I determined on a further movement in advance.

Loosening my dagger in my belt, and feeling that the butt of a pistol was near my hand, I tried to force open the casement, and greatly to my joy, although somewhat to my surprise, it opened as readily as it ever did of yore to my boyish hand.

This, of itself, was a proof that it had been overlooked, or that it was unknown, and I did not hesitate at once to enter.

Before I did so, however, I dispatched one of my followers back to the Count, to tell him of my discovery, and to solicit from him the

assistance of two more of his force, in order, that in the event of opposition, before we could open the front door, we might advance to battle with a reasonable chance of success.

The required addition reached me almost immediately, with an assurance from the Count that he would keep up the diversion in front, and thus, high in hope and determined in purpose, I superintended the ingress of my men, and with equal silence and despatch, saw them satisfactorily mustered within the room.

We were now seven men, all well armed, and six of us, at least, professionally accustomed to danger and careless of its approach, while, as to myself, my only anxiety was to confront it as speedily as possible.

My whispered directions were brief, and merely consisted in telling them to follow me in single file, having first prepared their weapons, and not to act, unless suddenly

attacked, except by my express directions. This done, I placed myself at their head, with a sword in one hand and a pistol in the other, and commenced my march.

I distinctly remembered that this wing of the building communicated with the others by two modes.

Leaving the room in which we now were and turning to the right, we should have passed along a lofty gallery, and so, by a series of descents, have reached the grand staircase, which terminated in the great hall.

On the other hand, by turning to the left, we became involved in a number of narrow, angular passages, on either side of which were bed chambers, intended originally for the use of a baronial household, which were reached from the lower or basement story of the castle by a narrow staircase, constructed solely for the use of the servants.

This was the way I chose, and I did so on

the calculation that if any of the Count's servants or assistants were in the lower regions, as in all likelihood they might be, it would be easy to surprise and master them, and thus render our further attempts easier and more certain of success.

Accordingly, we groped our way along the mildewed walls, assisted occasionally by a straggling ray of starry-light which entered through the high narrow windows as we passed along, and having made our way down several flights of curving stairs, all time worn and tender, and, therefore, requiring some extra caution to tread without noise, we at length arrived at the bottom. As this passage was flagged, it was well that I had taken the precaution to disencumber the troopers of their war-boots, as their clatter on the pavement might have been an awkward incident; but as it was, we glided on like ghosts, until, on turning an angle of the passage, we, at last,

became convinced that we were in the neighbourhood of life, at all events.

Opposite to us was a door, which stood partly ajar, and through which a light was streaming, whilst the murmur of voices reached us from within.

Pausing for a moment, and whispering to my two immediate followers to come on, and for the others to halt, I crept forward, and standing within the shadow of the wall, I was enabled to perceive that there were three men in the apartment, having the appearance of servants, and all of whom were very busily engaged in emptying a large black-jack, the contents of which, by the steam and odour, seemed to be mulled wine, highly spiced.

Two of these men were young, and the third was old.

The latter was unarmed, but the others wore sabres, and on a small table a little

nearer to us than they were, two short guns and a pair of pistols were carelessly laid, as if in readiness for immediate use.

As the din and clamour made by the old Count and his force, reached the ears of this trio, the two younger men laughed loud, but the old man looked serious—

“I don’t like this business, at all,” he said, in a voice which I recognized as that of the person who had first answered us from the window, “and I am sorry to perceive a master of mine engaged in a course that requires such measures to sustain it.”

“Tush man !” replied one of the others, a mere stripling ; “the fellows will get tired at last, and so take your advice, old Carl, and go away until to-morrow, when they will find the nests empty and the birds flown.”

“Aye, or Count Albert will marry the

lady to-night," said his comrade, "and so be entitled to throw open the doors and ask them what the devil they mean by interfering with his amusements, and asking for *his* wife. Father Paul came down with us, you know, and though he is no favourite of his bishop, still, once a priest always a priest, and the knot he ties is just as regular as though he were in the odour of sanctity instead of being stripped of his gown."

I heard no more.

In another moment I was in the room, and before they could move from their seats, the three men were prisoners, and told that on their silence depended their lives.

To say the truth, they took the matter quietly enough, and the two younger ones, submitted to be disarmed of their swords, as if it were no sort of hardship to part with them.

The old man seemed completely unnerved by fear, and answered the questions I asked him as if he were too much bent on conciliating his strange looking and unexpected questioner, to care much how far his answers might involve his employer.—

“Your master, Count Albert, is in the Castle?” I said to him briefly and sternly.

“He is, sir—he arrived to-night.”

“Why then did you deny him to me a while since?”

“His own orders, sir—I could not help it,” was his feeble reply.

“You are a resident here?”

“I am. I have lived here these two years.”

“A young lady arrived here ten days since—where is she now?”

“Above stairs, sir, with—with the Count.”

“And the man who came with her—where is he?”

“With my master, also.”

“What force is now in the Castle—how many men?” I again demanded.

“Six men, sir, besides these who are now here.”

“Where are they? How are they disposed?”

“They are mustered in the green chamber, to the right of the hall—all but one, and he keeps guard in the hall itself.

“Have you the key of the hall door?”

“I have, sir—here it is?”

I clutched the key, and leaving two of my men to guard my prisoners, I recommenced my search.

Cautiously and cat-like, we began now to ascend rather than to descend.

As my head came on a level with the floor of the hall, which was supported by

marble pillars and extended to fifty feet in length, or perhaps more, I peered anxiously forward to see how matters were.

I knew that the green chamber, indicated by the old man, was situated on my left hand, near to the hall door, and I could see that the man left to guard the hall, and, probably, to give notice of the efforts from without, was at *my* end of the hall, and was stationary with his back towards us.

Under these circumstances, I resorted to a *ruse* to get him within my grasp.

"Hist!" I said, in a whisper, imitating the voice of old Carl, as well as I could. "Come hither, quick."

He turned quickly round, as I spoke.

"Who speaks—what do you want?" he demanded, in the same cautious tone.

"It is I—Carl," I answered; "I have three words to say to you. Be quick."

He advanced hastily to the head of the

stairs, and in another moment my hand was on his throat, and his voice stifled :—

“Breathe a single word—utter a single cry,” said I, “and you will never utter another. Be silent and you are safe.”

Leaving him to the care of my followers, I glided on to the door, just as a fresh volley of blows, apparently from the butt end of the troopers’ musketoon were showered upon it. To remove the cross-bolt from the middle, and to insert the key and turn it by main force in the lock were the achievements of a second, and in another it stood wide open, and the troopers’ blows were suspended in consequence.

“Where is Count Nugent?” I said, in a low voice.

“Here, Gerald.”

“The entire force of the castle, is in the room to the right,” I said. “Let the men prepare their arms and follow me. There is a light in the chamber, I can see it through

the chinks. Let them be secured without noise—if that be possible.”

Followed by the whole force, I advanced to the door of the green-chamber, and opened it. Never was surprise more complete. Clustered round the fire, but fully armed, six able-bodied men, presented themselves to our view. Some stood, and some sat, but all were in earnest conversation, and it was with looks of terror as well as of surprise, that their eyes were turned upon me, singular as my appearance was, at such a place and such an hour, and backed as I was by so imposing a force.

“Gentlemen,” I said, calmly, “you are our prisoners, but further than a temporary detention, no harm is intended you, save such as you choose to bring upon yourselves, by an ill-advised and useless resistance to the force you see. Deliver up your arms and you are safe; use them if you please, but let the consequences light on your own heads.”

The alternative was accepted at once, and the arms were delivered up. Only one man, who seemed superior in station and manner to the rest, said, as he delivered up his sword :—

“You have taken us by surprise, sir, or your victory would not have been quite so easy. I am to hope that our master is safe, and no harm intended him ?”

“I am not privileged to answer unnecessary questions,” said I. “Your master’s fate must depend upon himself.”

A guard of four men was left to look after the fresh batch of prisoners, and then, having hastily summoned the old man, Carl, and commanded him to conduct us to the presence of his master, I left the room, accompanied by Count Nugent, and followed by the subordinate officer who commanded the military party, and three more of his men.

All these incidents, which have taken so

long to relate, did not, in action, occupy quite twenty minutes of time. So far as I had gone, fortune had singularly favored me, but still the great event was to be decided, and it was to be seen whether, she, for whom these efforts were made was to be restored to me, without any of those afflicting drawbacks which the contaminating influence of such a protector as Count Albert are apt to leave upon those whom they approach. That both he and she were now within my reach was certain, and that the fate of one or other of us depended on the result of our coming interview was equally so.

All my passions were up in arms, and to Count Nugent's whispered counsels to be calm, I only replied by entreating him to spare me for the present, and to allow me still to conduct the enterprise in hand, and to be, himself, rather a witness than an actor of what should occur between Count Albert and me. Awed,

or, at least, silenced, by my manner, the old man, submitted himself to my control with the docility of a child, and when, with much fear and trembling, the ancient seneschal, who evidently looked upon me with a sort of superstitious dread, conducted us up the great staircase, and then, having mounted a second one, advanced along a wide gallery or corridor, and pointing, with a trembling finger, to the last door in the range, said :—

“ It is in that *suite* of apartments, my lord is to be found ; I dare not proceed further, gentlemen.”

The Count suffered me to go in advance, and at my whispered request, remained near the door of the first chamber of the *suite*, whilst I advanced breathlessly but eagerly to reconnoitre the second, from which a bright light issued, and the folding door of which, on one side, was partly open.

The scene within was one of deep and fearful

interest for me, and were I to live a thousand years I never could forget it, or the wild, fiery impression it made upon me. Behind a table, on which was spread a white cloth, and on which were four lighted candles, in massive silver candlesticks, a silver crucifix, and a silver vessel containing what I afterwards found to be holy water, stood a short, thick, dissipated looking man, with a florid cheek and a murky eye, arrayed in surplice and stole, and holding open a large prayer-book or missal, as if prepared to perform some sacred ceremony, according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. This personage I took to be Father Paul, the degraded priest, of whom I had heard mention made a short time before. At one end of the table stood a female, evidently one of the lowest of the class, while at the other end stood the Great Kristan, dressed in tawdry finery, but every trace of his usual jaunty self-importance vanished and gone; while, in its

place, the pallid cheek, wandering eye, and restless manner, showed that the feeling which had superseded it was anything but a pleasant one. But these were only subordinate members of the group, and arrested my attention merely for a passing moment. The principals are still to be described. Kneeling at the feet of Count Albert was my poor Milenka, with dishevelled hair, streaming eyes, and clasped hands, while, looking down upon her, he listened to her entreaties with an air of stolid determination rather than anything else.

“You are a fool to yourself, as well as cruel to me,” were the first words I heard him utter. “You cannot leave this castle with an unblemished character or an untainted name, and though I have the power to bend you to my will, as I have done hundreds of others, I love you too well to injure you. There stands the priest and here are the witnesses; I am willing to prove the reality of my affection by

giving you a legal title to my name, and to forget that you are a stroller's daughter by making you an Austrian noble's bride. Up, then, dear Milenka, and standing before this holy man, record with me those vows which neither dwarf, deity, nor demon can undo. Look on me as one born to save you from disgrace, and to raise you to a sphere where your proudest claims will be acknowledged, and your noblest ambition gratified."

He strove to raise her as he concluded, but still she cowered at his feet.

"Spare me, my lord—oh! spare me," she said, in accents of despair that made the blood course through my veins in torrents of molten flame; "I cannot love you, do not require me to perjure myself; I do not seek to be other than I am; do not—oh! do not compel me to embrace a fate which must bring me life-long misery instead of happiness or peace. Dismiss that man, and let me go free; I will thank

you—honor you—esteem you: your name shall never pass my lips, save with gratitude and honor; and should others question me, or try to criminate you, I solemnly promise you that while I have a breath to utter, it shall be in your defence.”

“As my wife, you will have a tenfold motive to proclaim my virtues, and defend my good name,” he said, with an air of irony, “I am not used to proffer benefits, and have them rejected—to solicit favors and be refused. We have gone too far to retract, and I am too tender of your reputation to yield to your inconsiderate remonstrances, or leave you to the impulse of your own foolish will. Rise, therefore, and suffer me to take my place by your side, or if you will not do so, listen while the rite proceeds, and let me have the satisfaction of claiming you as a bride, even though it be an unwilling one.”

At a signal from him the priest quitted

his present position behind the table, and advanced to the table where the Count and his victim were. At the same time, Kristan and the female witness also approached, and thus hemmed in, as it were, by foes, the startled girl rose to her feet, and with a despairing cry, turned and dashed through the door at which I stood.

What instantly followed was, on my part, an unpremeditated *coup-de-théâtre*, or, at least, had all the effects of one. I had suffered the Milenka to get beyond me, certain that she would be safe, and there stood I, sword in hand, opposed to Count Albert, who was about to follow her.

He glared at me wildly for a single instant, as if I were a ghost, and then, comprehending his position, his weapon was drawn, and he was about to rush upon me, when I said to him—

“ I am here to arrest you as a criminal, not

to combat with you as a gentleman. Drop your sword if you would save your life, my lord—your victim is beyond your reach.”

His answer was a fierce thrust, which wounded me slightly in the sword arm. This attack was all that I wanted, for it excused me to myself. Surprised, and, in some degree, unnerved by the suddenness of my appearance, as well as by the awkward position in which he found himself, he fought wildly and desperately rather than coolly or resolutely, and whatever his reputation for skill might have been, he now left himself open to his adversary, more than once, in a very unguarded and unscientific way. Successful as I had been in counteracting his schemes, I began to pity him, and would have saved him from the consequences of his own headlong fury if I could. But it was not to be. He struck at random, and seemed careless of his own life so that he could take mine. Another flesh wound in my

side warned me that I must look to my own safety, and having failed in two distinct attempts to disarm him, I put forth all my skill and strength, and my next pass was through his body, the hilt of my weapon striking heavily against his breast bone. He fell instantly as I recovered the weapon, and never spoke more. He was dead, in fact, before his body reached the ground.

Three minutes, or little more, had done it all, and so great was the fury of the combat, that no one had time to interfere between us. Indeed, it would have been hazardous to do so, and, moreover, as it was a fair hand to hand encounter, the old Count was not the man to interpose unnecessarily, as he looked at the matter quite in a professional way. During the fray, we had advanced into the room from whence the Milenka had fled ; and, by a singular coincidence, the lifeless body of Count Albert now lay stretched on precisely the spot

where I had seen her kneeling to him a few moments before.

"He has got it, Gerald," said the Count, looking down at the corpse, already rigid in death, "but he earned it richly, and those who do so, seldom fail to meet their reward, either here or hereafter. You are a capital swordsman, and fence like an angel. I saw from the first that it was all over with him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEW DISCOVERIES.

As I turned to leave the room, in order to look after the Milenka, I found my way obstructed, and on looking round, I discovered the Great Kristan kneeling at my feet, and clinging to my cloak. Had I followed the first impulse of my anger, his career of villany would have had as sudden a termination as that of his

employer's had been, but I curbed my temper and merely looked at him, as he grovelled before me—

“On my life, dear Zenco!” he said, in accents of the greatest terror, “on my soul, as there is a heaven above me, I could not help it!”

“Take this man away,” said I, to the soldiers who stood near me, “and let him and his companions in crime be guarded. What he has to say shall be listened to hereafter.”

I broke from his grasp and left the chamber as I spoke; but not without difficulty, as he still entreated me wildly to hear all he had to say in his defence.

Count Nugent had taken the precaution to have the Milenka removed to one of the lower chambers, where she now was.

My meeting with her more than repaid me for all the suffering I had sustained in her cause.

She had sunk to her knees in a corner of the room; but on my appearance, at the sound of my voice, she arose, only to throw herself into my arms—to overwhelm me with her thanks and caresses—and to bedew me with her tears.

“But you are wounded, Gerald,” she said to me, at last, as she observed the warm blood on my sleeve; “and I have been the cause of this misfortune to you, with all the rest.”

“You shall look upon my scratch,” said I, gaily, “and heal it. It is already forgotten.”

“And—and Count Albert, Gerald?” she said interrogatively, “and Kristan?”

“Umph! They are safe,” I replied, “and will molest you no more. Think not of them, for the present, dearest Milenka, but let me introduce you to my friend. I will bring him hither in a moment.”

The Count had employed his time, while I was engaged with the Milenka, in numbering and regulating his prisoners.

The ordinary servants and retainers of Count Albert were congregated in one room, and a guard placed over them.

The clergyman, who had so disgracefully profaned his sacred calling, and the wretched Kristan, now sunk to the lowest depths of despondency, were placed in separate chambers, and closely watched.

Neither had the comfort and accommodation of his own men been forgotten by their provident commander.

The old man, Carl, had been obliged to point out his cellar, and unlock his store; and after their short campaign, the troopers of Maria Theresa were consoled for their fatigues, by the enjoyment of such fare as had seldom before fallen to their lot.

“They had little work to do, as it hap-

pened," observed the Count, laughing; "you forestalled them in that, Gerald; but we must take the will for the deed, and encourage them to future exertion by rewarding them beforehand. It is the rule of all prudent commanders, and I rank high on the list. Now introduce me to your charming Milenka, and then let us see what they have done for us."

The old man's reception of the blushing girl was frank, fatherly, and like himself. He took her in his arms, and kissed her on either side of the cheek, and then seating her by his side, he congratulated her warmly on her escape.

"But I knew how it would be when my young relative took the matter in hand," he said, gallantly; "and now that I look upon the cause of his anxiety, I do not wonder that he risked life and limb for its restoration and defence."

After partaking of some refreshment, and having seen my recovered treasure safe bestowed in her own chamber, I once more visited the rounds, and then threw myself on a bed and slept. I had earned slumber, and I enjoyed it heartily.

The next morning, at an early hour, preparations were made for our return to Vienna, and, after our morning meal, we set forward.

The carriage in which the unfortunate Count Albert had travelled the night before, was placed at the disposal of the Milenka, and as my wounds, though slight, were painful, I occupied a seat by her side, while Count Nugent was our welcome *vis-a-vis*.

The servants and partisans of the deceased Count were set at liberty, and his remains committed to their charge, but the Great Kristan, and his clerical co-offender, were placed, side by side, in a sort of tumbril or

cart, manacled and guarded, and were obliged to travel in our train.

I had not held any sort of communication with Kristan, since his confinement, although he had sent the humblest messages to me, entreating me to see him for a single moment. But I had still a game to play with him—a discovery to make, and as my greatest anxiety *now* was to discover all that was to be known relative to my young charge's birth, parentage, and early history, I knew that fear was the best assistant I could procure, and that if anything could make him candid or truthful, it was the knowledge that the life he prized so highly, and feared so much to lose, would be surely forfeited by his attempt at falsehood or prevarication. My response to him, therefore, consisted in coldly saying to his messenger, that justice must take its course, and that having disregarded my wishes and advice, I could no further be his friend.

On arriving in Vienna, we had the satisfaction to learn that a new and favorable turn of the Queen's affairs had occurred, and that as the capital was now safe from attack, she might be expected there almost immediately.

Frederick of Prussia, the ablest, subtlest, and most energetic of all her numerous enemies, had taken alarm at the rapid progress of the Elector of Bavaria, and was displeased with the imperious conduct of France, who treated the princes of Germany as if they were vassals instead of allies, and he now showed every disposition to abate in these haughty and unjust demands which had driven Maria Theresa almost to desperation. In fact, as the historian of the family states, at this critical juncture of the Queen's affairs, "the house of Austria was saved by the very hand from which it had received the first wound."

To me, personally, the expected return of

my royal mistress was peculiarly gratifying, because it rendered my absence from Vienna unnecessary, and gave me the prospect of securing for the Milenka, her countenance and protection.

She had frequently, during my private interviews with her, recurred to the subject of the young girl's mysterious history, and, as I had now a reasonable hope of arriving at a correct solution, through the terrors rather than the justice of the conjurer, I determined to place the entire of my case in the hands of the Queen, and to trust to her good feeling and strong womanly curiosity, for sifting it to the bottom.

In this determination, I was strongly fortified by the opinion and advice of the old Count, who had lived too long in the atmosphere of courts as well as of camps, not to know precisely the mode likely to succeed in both.

“Don't budge a foot—don't stir an inch in

the matter, Gerald," he said to me, "until you submit the whole to her Majesty, and learn her pleasure as to what is best to be done. She has proved herself fit to govern men, and has found out a way to hold her own, against the longest odds that ever beset a monarch or perilled a crown. Leave it all to her, boy; she likes to meddle in small things as well as in large; and if there is a mystery to be solved, or a wrong redressed, take my word for it, that she will never let the scent cool until she accomplishes both in the same gallant style with which she has brought Fritz to his senses, and turned the tide against Charles, when they imagined that she and all that belonged to her were as firmly pouched as if they had them already in their pockets. Aha! long life to petticoat government—though, for the best part of my days, I thought it only consisted of first catching fools in a net, and then plaguing the soul out of them when they were there!"

In truth, at the very first audience to which I was admitted by the Queen, I found that our calculations were perfectly right, and that this admirable and indefatigable woman entered as warmly into my feelings and listened as patiently to the history of my proceedings, as though I were an ambassador returning from an important mission, or a General relating the issue of a well fought field—

“It is a strange history,” she said, as I concluded all that I thought it necessary to say, “and has been wrought by strange instruments, Gerald. But you are right in your conclusion. This Black Baron, as you call him, is evidently the contriver of the mischief, and, if it be possible to arrive at the truth at all, the surest way to do so, will be to confront him and his villanous agent together, without previous notification to either. That can be done within the

hour, as the Baron and his associates have been brought to Vienna for trial, and his accomplice is equally near at hand. It is now noon—attend here in two hours with the young girl, Count Nugent, and whoever else you may think it necessary to bring, and, in the mean time, I will take care that the others shall be in attendance also. You were wise to lay the matter thus unreservedly before us, and it will be our care, as it is our privilege, to examine into it narrowly and see perfect justice done.”

When I related the substance of this interview to the Count, he laughed and said—

“I told you so, Gerald, did I not? By all means leave it in the royal hands; it cannot be in better. Her Majesty has taken to it warmly, and means to proceed with it, as promptly and summarily as she does with everything else. If Kristan does

not make a full confession, it will not be for want of a searching examiner. Were he ten times a conjurer, she will worm his trick out of him, I promise you !”

With the Milenka, the only difficulty I had to contend against, was the natural timidity of one so young, artless, humble, and unsophisticated, to appear in the presence of one so elevated both by position and character, almost without warning or preparation.

But then she had heard much from me of the queenly condescension which formed so beautiful a trait in the disposition of the Queen, and, moreover, *I* was to be by her side to support and direct her—and with this double consolation, she prepared with a beating heart, and features flattered into greater loveliness by their agitation, to obey the royal command.

No sovereign who ever lived knew better

how to win hearts without losing respect than Maria Theresa ; and when introduced, by me, the trembling girl appeared before her, in a private audience, and before the introduction of those who were to take part in the forthcoming drama, the reception accorded her was so gracious, so womanly, and so dignified withal, that the blood of the awe-struck Milenka, at once came back to her pallid cheek, the accents and limbs ceased to tremble, and her whole aspect denoted the gratifying fact that fear and confusion had alike melted away beneath the beneficent beam that had shone forth in order to dissipate them.

After a short period thus given to courtesy and kindness, an usher was summoned, and, in a few minutes three or four grave, elderly men made their appearance, and took their places, standing by the side of the Queen.

These were judges, learned in the law, and whose presence she wished to have, in order

to direct herself by their counsels and profit by their experience and knowledge.

After them came Count Nugent—the Grand Duke was absent from Vienna and did not appear—and, finally, at different doors, the Black Baron and the Great Kristan were brought in, while, as they took their stations, an officer placed himself in silence by the side of each.

The appearance of the prisoners contrasted as strongly as did their characters. Sullen and scornful, although wasted and wan, the Baron looked around him, and seemed to be alike careless of and indifferent to everything he saw—while the whole appearance of Kristan denoted the utter prostration of his outward and inward man, under the influence of extreme terror, the most abject and painful to look upon it is possible to conceive. His eye wandered to every part of the chamber, and to every individual in it; and, it was evident,

that my appearance and that of thð Milenka, increased his alarm to the highest pitch, so that I almost feared he would be incapacitated from giving that evidence and making those revealments, which it was the present objects to secure.

For a moment or two there was a total silence in the apartment, and then, in a clear, calm, grave voice, the Qucen desired the Milenka to advance and place herself before her. When this had been done, as she commanded, Maria Theresa turned her eye to Kristan, and addressed him in the same tone—

“You know this young lady?” she said.

“I do, my ever gracious liege,” was the faltering reply.

“You have reared her as your daughter? You have been accustomed to call her by that name?”

“I—I have, my liege.”

“And is she so?”

The person thus suddenly interrogated, looked imploringly round the circle, hesitated for a second or two, and then dropped on his knees—

“Mercy, my gracious liege—mercy, royal madam, and I will confess to all!” he said, while his earnestness of voice, raised hands, and brimming eyes, showed that fright had made him sincere in intention, at least.

The Queen commanded him, in a voice of slight disgust, to stand up, and when he had done so, with the assistance of his guard, she resumed her examination.

“We are to understand, then,” she said, “that you have no claims to her paternity—that she is *not* your daughter?”

“Mercy, gracious madam,” persisted the wily Kristan, “and I will at once own everything!”

“The truth shall be wrung from you, word

for word, unless you speak at once," said the Queen, in a voice of anger that made the boldest of us tremble. "We demand, once more, to know whether this young lady, commonly styled the Milenka, be your offspring or not?"

"She is—is not, my liege," was the hesitating answer.

"So! You will earn the mercy you crave by an honest confession of your faults much sooner than by a pitiable exhibition of your weakness," said the Queen, by way of encouragement. "You have acknowledged that you are not her father—whose child is she, then?"

"You embolden me to speak, by your goodness, merciful madam," replied the conjurer, as if taking a sudden resolution, but, in reality, because he saw that it was his better course, "and you shall hear all that I am able to disclose."

He looked at the Baron, and so did I, but the gloomy eye was firmly fixed on the ground, and he appeared to listen without comprehending what was said.

"The father of the girl, reared by me, and called the Milenka, was an Austrian noble—Count Alberic of Reiterberg by name," he said.

There was a pause of wonder—almost of consternation at this announcement, but, after a moment, the Queen continued the interrogation. At the instant the disclosure was made, the Baron slightly moved and raised his eyes to Kristan's person, but immediately dropped them again.

"How came you into possession of a child of Count Alberic of Reiterberg?" demanded the Queen.

"Her father was dead, and I was employed to *murder* her, my liege," replied Kristan, looking again towards the Black Baron.

“By whom? Who was your tempter to a crime so terrible?” proceeded the Queen.

“Her nearest relative, my liege,” answered Kristan, growing calmer, if not bolder, as he went on; “she was the heiress of her father’s wealth and his only child, and her death was necessary in order that her guardian might take her place, for he was the next akin, and was a needy, improvident, and dissipated man.”

“What was the name of this unscrupulous employer of yours?”

“He stands in your presence, gracious madam, and is called the Baron of Erlsfurth. I challenge him to deny what I have said, if he dare?”

It was evident that the Great Kristan was getting on better terms with himself, from the magniloquence of his tone.

At this direct appeal to him, the Baron

raised his eyes, and said in a cold and sneering voice :—

“The child of Alberic of Reiterberg lies by her father’s side—let his tomb be opened, and her remains will be found.”

“I deny it, my liege,” said Kristan, now anxious on his own account to tell all he knew. “The history of the whole transaction is this. I was known to the Baron of Erlsfurth as a person of careless habits and too fond of pleasure to be careful of the little I was able to earn. We had met in houses of play, and—and elsewhere, and, after some time, he gradually opened to me his plans, and tempted me by the promise of a reward, which I—which I found myself unable to withstand.”

He dropped his voice and wiped his eyes, at this part of his narration, but again resumed his story, after a momentary pause.

“Our plans were laid, and the directions I received were first to kidnap the child, and

then to put an end to her life, in whatever way I pleased. The first part of the affair I accomplished, by watching the child and bribing her maid. I took lodgings in the neighbourhood of the Reiterberg demesne, where the young lady was sent to reside by her guardian, and as my purse was well-filled, and I announced myself as a student in art, and therefore a gentleman, I was permitted to visit the galleries and grounds of the mansion, by the person who had the care of both. It took me some weeks to effect my purpose, but, at last, I lulled asleep the suspicion of the intendant by my liberality, and I induced the young female who had a particular charge of the young Countess, to believe that I was deeply in love with, and meant to marry her. The child—who was then little more than five years of age—became familiar with my person, and was often intrusted to my care, to ramble through the grounds. In one of these rambles

we both disappeared—the child had eaten a sweetmeat, drugged by me, and slept heavily, and, in this state it was easy to convey her to a carriage which had been provided for that purpose, and once there, I entertained but little fear of pursuit. I am aware that, after some weeks, the remains of a child were discovered, and taken from a piece of ornamental water, situate in a distant part of the desmesne, and that it was understood to be the body of the Countess, and buried, with becoming pomp, in the family vault. But no one knows better than the Baron of Erlsfurth himself that the body so interred, was *not* that of the young Countess, but one procured by me—purchased, in fact, from the sexton of a grave-yard—and sunk by me in that piece of water, in order that hereafter it might be found. This part of the transaction was managed by him, and he can speak to it, if he will.

“The servants of the mansion were changed,

and strangers appointed in their place, as I understood ; and when the mutilated remains were at last discovered, *he* discovered a likeness to the young Countess, which no one round him either dared or could deny.

“ But I fearlessly challenge him, in this august presence, to say if I have not told the truth, and if part of my instructions was not to bear away the young Countess *alive*, in order, that at my leisure, I might destroy her by poison or otherwise—I challenge him to that.”

The speaker was now coming to that part of his narrative which was most favorable to himself, and his demeanour became proportionally elated and assured.

He turned to the Baron, as he uttered his challenge, and raised his voice, and pointed his finger, with an air of triumph and superiority. But the person to whom he addressed himself made no sign and gave no answer. He

seemed oppressed by a drowsy, dreamy lethargy, which to my eye began to look suspicious, and even when the Queen herself commanded him to speak, his lip curled, and his brow lowered still more darkly, but he remained as silent and unobservant as before. As he declined to answer, at this stage of the proceedings, Kristan was commanded to proceed.

“The presence of the Milenka herself,” he said, pointing to her, as she stood overwhelmed with the nature of his relation, “will prove that I had a better conscience than my tempter gave me credit for. I did not put his terrible commands into execution—I could not. I looked in her innocent face, and it appeared to be that of my guardian angel come to warn me of the awful consequences of the deed I had been hired to commit. I dared not restore her to her rights—I dared not acknowledge the plunge I had made into iniquity—the


Baron's power and my own poverty prevented me from doing so; but I saved her life—that cannot be denied—I saved her life, my gracious liege, I baffled her intended destroyer, by telling him that she was dead, and I reared her if not with all the care which was her due, at least, with as much as my own wandering life and pressing necessities enabled me to bestow upon her. Zenco—Gerald can bear favorable witness for me on that point, as I am sure his own kind heart will prompt him to do.”

This *ad misericordiam* appeal to me was well put. I might have reminded him, had I pleased, that although he had saved the child's life, he had done little to make that life respectable; and that if the Milenka was now intelligent, virtuous, and accomplished, *he* had had but little hand in that charitable work.

I did not care to press him on that tender

point, however, but I reminded him that his participation in the outrage perpetrated by Count Albert was still to be explained, and accounted for.

“Alas! dear Zencó,” he said, in accents of the most accurately simulated woe, “my conduct in that unfortunate matter was of a piece with all the rest. Had *you* remained near me I should have continued firm and faithful to the end. But it was not to be. Prosperity rendered me thoughtless, as poverty had laid me open to temptation. The house of Erlsfurth was destined to be in every way unfortunate to me. I had withstood the snare of the father only to fall deeper—deeper into those of his unhappy son. I had the misfortune to become acquainted with Count Albert in the same haunts where I had formerly met the Baron; He had stripped me of my last coin, and, worse than that, he had, in an unguarded moment, wormed from me the secret



of the Milenka's birth—or, to be more accurate, I had threatened to reveal the secret of her pretensions, unless he remitted his demands upon me and contributed to my support. From that moment I was an undone man. He determined to make her his wife, in order that her claims should be silenced, and I—I say it to my sorrow and my shame—” here he struck his forehead in his old theatrical manner, and indulged in a volley of groans—“ I permitted myself once more to be tempted, although I felt that if she *could* love him, her marriage with him would restore her to the position which I had once helped to deprive her of. This august and honorable company know the rest,” he continued, dropping his voice and turning up his eyes; “ she was lured to a ball, and then carried to the Castle, where Zenco's sagacity discovered us, and the Count perished by his sword, whilst I—I remain, to atone for my many

errors by a life of repentant misery, if I am spared a death of shame."

At this moment all eyes were turned to the Black Baron, who roused himself for a moment, and said to the officer who stood beside him, in a voice which struggled to be calm, although it was hoarse and broken—

"Let me go hence—I burn."

He made a step or two forward as he spoke, and then dropped heavily almost at the terrified Milenka's feet.

He was instantly raised and borne into another room, but before a physician could arrive to administer to him—he was dead. Some examination of his case was subsequently made, but it was never accurately known whether his sudden death was the work of his own agency, or that of a Greater Power.

He had never raised his head from the moment in which his son's death was announced

to him, and although all the officials connected with his prison denied having provided him with any deleterious matter, public rumour attributed his death to poison, and does so still.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNTESS EMMELINE OF REITERBERG.

FROM the cradle to the grave—from the hut to the palace—from poverty to prosperity—from joy to sorrow—from health and hilarity to disease and death—the incidents of humanity are made up of such transmutations, and events, sudden and startling, which, taken by themselves, would have struck us with awe or moved us to wonder, are passed over as the daily

occurrences of a life, which, in its aggregate of facts, outrivals the figments of the wildest imagination, and sometimes hardens the fibres of the tenderest heart.

A month has passed away, or little more. What an atom of time it is, and yet how much may be compressed within its miserable limits! The victorious Maria Theresa still marching triumphantly towards that supremacy, which her genius and courage so well entitled her to, and which she was destined so long to enjoy; the Baron of Erlsfurth buried; his co-conspirators humbled and condemned; the Great Kristan pardoned for his services and banished for his crimes; and the poor wandering girl, for whom I had thought, felt, acted, and combatted, now raised far—far above me, as Emmeline, Countess of Reiterberg, one of the richest heiresses in the whole Germanic circle!

It was a critical period for her—a dangerous

position. Impulsive and energetic in all she undertook, the Queen had not rested until her claims were established and her fortune restored.

There was no contest, for the Baron and his son were dead, and they were the only opponents to be feared, and the laws, when put in motion, by the will of a sovereign, are always sure to be speedily dispensed. The young countess was now looked upon as the favourite of the monarch, and the favourite of a monarch is always the idol of the court. Independent of these extrinsic claims, however, she possessed special attractions of her own, and the graces of the beautiful girl were elevated into sublimity by the reality of her wealth. The esteem of the sovereign cast a halo round her person, and this again was enlarged and widened by the lustre reflected from her ancient title and princely domains.

For a time I saw nothing of all this. I

hailed her as Countess of Reiterberg, and I left her in the care and under the protection of one too pure and exalted herself not to be equally jealous of the virtues of the friends who were familiarly admitted to her side.

This done, I purposely quitted Vienna, on a mission of importance, of which no one knew the object, not even myself. I revolted at the idea of becoming a curb upon her feelings, or a spy upon her acts, and I resolved to absent myself from her presence for three months, lest the influence I had gained over the innocent and friendless Milenka should control or prevent the genuine development of nature or character in the ennobled Emmeline.

The Queen would have forbidden this sacrifice on my part, but my entreaties were urgent, and she yielded to my obstinacy what she would have refused to my humility or—properly speaking—to my pride.

The old Count was still more indignant.

The young Countess had become the very light of his eyes—the life-blood of his heart ; he could not understand my scruples, and he swore that if any evil came near her, he would lay it at my door, and shoot me through the head for my chivalry. But I persisted and departed, and for the three next months, I wandered about the world, like a restless spirit, and at the end of them once more appeared before the Count, more like a ghost than a living man.

“ You think yourself a mighty fine fellow, Mr. Gerald Nugent,” was his gruff address to me, as I entered the room ; “ and you have come back, I presume, to look upon the havoc you have made ? Go to your royal mistress and see what *she* will say to you ! You are a philosopher, a stoic it seems—a block, stock, stone you are, rather, and because you once had the good fortune to be of service to a friend, you think you are entitled to play what

freaks and cut what capers you please in order to make their life miserable afterwards."

"I do not understand what you mean, Count!" said I, in answer to this very pertinent address.

"Of course you don't," replied the choleric Count, with a bitter sneer; "you have been in the moon of late, and think it beneath you to pay any attention to mere sublunary affairs. You never received my letter, nor encountered with my messenger, or heard of my poor dear Emmeline's illness? Oh, no! you have been engaged in—"

"Illness! Is she ill?"

"She will die, I tell you—that's all—unless—"

I waited to hear no more, but turned and left the apartment, and in ten minutes more, I was at her door.

"The Countess?" I said to the servant, who opened it. It was all I could say, for my heart beat as it had never throbbed before.

"My lady is ill, sir, and cannot be seen," replied the lacquey, with a lordly air, for he knew me not.

"Is she confined to bed?"

"Not quite that," was the answer; "she is in the drawing-room, but does not receive visitors at present."

I dashed past him, and before he could recover his surprise at my audacity, I was roaming wildly from chamber to chamber, while he, I suppose, went to procure assistance to arrest or otherwise dispose of me.

At length my search was over, I came to the right apartment, where pale, languid, melancholy, and to the last degree attenuated, sat the object of all my cares, hopes, feelings, and aspirations, suffering rather than enjoying the gentle summer air, which came through the lattice to cool her fevered brow. There also—constant in fidelity as a dog, and like a dog, too, almost stretched at her feet—was poor

honest Abraham Braun, listening to her low voice, and watching every look as if upon it hung his own life. Of all her friends, she had selected that humble one to bear her company, and amidst all her splendour, *he* still was thought of, favoured, and caressed.

I paused a moment in the shadow of a large screen to recover myself, but I could distinguish that her slender finger was raised, as she looked towards the door.

"Hist! Abraham," she murmured; "I thought I heard a step; and strange as it may seem, my poor friend, I thought that step was like—but no, Abraham, no; I fear he has forgotten us both. We have given him naught but trouble, and even friendship itself grows weary at the prospect of continued toil."

"But not such friendship as his—not such friendship as Gerald Nugent's, Countess," replied Abraham, boldly. "I cannot believe it—it is impossible. The Count's letter has

missed him, and so has her Majesty's messenger, or he would have been here before this, to—"

He paused and started to his feet, for just then he raised his eyes, and caught a glance of me.

I raised my finger to warn him, but it was too late. She, also, had seen me, and as a bright flush rose to her cheek, she attempted to stand. The next moment I was at her feet.

"I said so—I thought so, dear Gerald," she said, abandoning to me the hand I prized so much. "I felt that you had not watched over me for years, to drop me from your memory at once. Are we still friends? If so, seat yourself by my side, and speak to me as you used to do, and only thus. Now that you *are* here, I shall grow well again. Oh! Gerald, you know not how I have missed you, or you would not have deserted me."

"I left you amidst friends," said I, "and in your altered fortunes, Countess—"

"Hush!" she said, placing her hand before my mouth, as she was wont to do. "You forget that all I possess, all that I am, all that makes me respected by others or satisfied with myself, I owe to you."

"Repay him them, Countess," said a voice, behind us, "and fetter him to your side by the adamantine bands forged by the church, since nothing less is strong enough to hold him."

On starting to my feet and looking round, I saw MARIA THERESA herself smiling upon us, and Count Nugent laughing in her train.

* * * * *

More than thirty years have passed away since that memorable day. Of the actors in it,

almost all have departed from the earth—but *she* who then was my hope and pride, and is still my blessing, sits by my side, as I finish this page, as bright, as good, as happy—almost as beautiful as ever.

THE END.

THE EMIGRANT RETURNED.

CHAPTER I.

MR. LORENZO O'TOOTHIL was a thriving man in his own county, although everybody was not in the secret of how his money had been made. There were those, it was said, who remembered him as plain Larry Toole, a sort of steward or under agent to the great O'Gradys of Ross, but as he had long since shaken off the degra-


dation of a dependent, so had he also got rid of the vulgarity of his appellation by converting the uneuphonious Larry into the Spanish Lorenzo, and the unpronounceable Toole into the classic O'Toohil. At the period in which we have to do with him, he was a middle man, of formidable dimensions, a magistrate of no ordinary power, a money dealer who made the most of his hoards by lending it out at the highest interest he could obtain, and, finally, the husband of Miss Francesca O'Rafferty, whose father was a direct descendent from the great O'Rafferty, the head of that remarkable sept. They had been married many years ago, when Lorenzo's fortunes had come to a culminating point, and as the lady's parents were poor, they bestowed her willingly, particularly as they had nothing better to give her than a great name and the proper pride that should accompany it—at least in *her* estimation.

In the usual course of time, sons and



daughters had grown to the side of this prosperous couple, and, of course, had been educated in the notions not unusual to those whose principal claims to attention are the length of the family purse. Robert Mortimer O'Toohil, their eldest son, was something more, if not better, than a squireen, inasmuch as he really had money to spend, and spent it profusely, if not generously, amongst those, in whose aristocratic eyes he would have found no great favor otherwise. Miss Belinda Selina O'Toohil, on her part, had been educated by a first-rate governess and finished at a first-rate boarding school. So had Miss Juliana Francesca, while the youngest daughter, named plainly Mary, had been somewhat overlooked because she was small and plain, and therefore, in the eyes of a rising family, good for nothing but to play, "Cinderella," to those who were hereafter destined to do credit to it. She now was (Mary I mean) about eighteen years of age, and in addition to the want of personal

attractions, she had taken the liberty of falling in love, the Christmas before, with young Frank O'Hara, who was *only* a respectable farmer, whom she had met while on a month's visit to a friend's—the said visit being allowed in order to get her out of the way of a houseful of grand company at home, and to spare the expense of dressing her, to meet them, in the same sumptuous style as her sisters. Besides, her chamber was wanted for the daughter of a deputy-lieutenant, a Miss Bidelia O'Flanagan, one of Robert Mortimer's flames, and intended as his bride—if nothing better worthy of his acceptance turned up in the mean time. But poor Mary's attachment produced no sympathy when young O'Hara broached it. One and all, her family were astonished at his presumption, treated him most unceremoniously, rejected him peremptorily, and turned their extreme wrath on Mary, for daring to have a heart, or to use it so degradingly. She was now a



Pariah—an outcast—a worse than ever condemned being, for had she not preferred worth to wealth, and could she ever hope to be forgiven by those whose sole ambition was to soar, and who cared little for any feeling or passion, save that which conduced to their own elevation.

As if to punish their besetting sins, a very unpleasant incident occurred while Mary was in the highest state of disgrace, and the suffering it involved. The family (all but Mary, of course) were assembled in the breakfast parlour, which looked out upon the well-kept and splendidly planted lawn of Mount Toohil, when an elderly, but very plainly, or rather meanly dressed man was seen to walk slowly up and to knock at the hall door.

“Who is he? Tell him I can’t be seen,” said Mr. Lorenzo, to the footman, who had entered to say that the stranger wished to speak with him.

"He says you know him, and that he is a friend, sir, who can't leave the country without seeing you," said the footman, returning.

"He has just arrived from the States—"

"The what?"

"From Americky, sir."

"The dev—that will do, John; I'll go to him in a few minutes," said his master, looking at his son, who was going out to hunt with Sir Dionysius Benigan.

"What is it, sir?" demanded the young gentleman.

"None of your horrible relations, I hope," said Mrs. O'Toohil, with an accent of the deepest disgust.

"I hope so, too, my dear; but no one can be sure of his fortune till he looks it full in the face."

He swallowed his coffee, and was leaving the room in a hurry, when the door opened, and the intrusive stranger appeared. His

garments were poor, and his address homely, but his cheek was ruddy, and his manner open and hearty.

"Larry, my boy, don't you know me?" said he to Mr. Lorenzo, after pausing a long minute, looking at that puzzled gentleman's face.

"You—you have the advantage of me, *sir*," replied Mr. Lorenzo, haughtily, displeased at hearing himself called "Larry" before his own family by such a mean-looking person.

"You never were under a greater mistake in your life," rejoined the stranger, "than to say I have the advantage of you, Larry. But our poor father always told us how it would be.

"'Larry, my boy,' he used to say to you, as he took his evening *shough* of the pipe; 'it's you that'll do elegant in the world, for you have great cuteness without much conscience to bother you; while for you, Murty,

you'll be ever and always a beggar or little better.'

"In troth, he was right, too, God be with him, and help me !"

"Who is this man, Mr. O'Toohil?" demanded Mrs. O'Toohil, in a tone of vehement displeasure.

"Your own brother-in-law, madam," said the unabashed stranger, with a low bow, "Murty Toole, by name—you may put the big O to it, if you like, I'm not above it, and no ways particular."

"*Can* this be true?" said Miss Belinda Selina.

"Impossible!" ejaculated her sister, after the manner of Miss O'Neill or Mrs. Siddons.

"I'm afeard I'm not welcome," said the stranger, who certainly saw little love in the looks around him.

"Devilish awkward, sir, isn't it?" said Mr. Robert to his father.

"But what brings you here?" asked Mr. Lorenzo, coldly of his brother, without taking his hand or asking him "the time of day," as the saying is.

"Misfortune!" said the old man, feelingly, in an altered tone, for he evidently saw that he was unwelcome. "I have spent my thirty years, and more if I'd say it, in striving to make both ends meet—and now they are as far asunder as ever. I did my best—the best can do no more; but I thought I never could want when I heard that my own mother's son had plenty and to spare to share with me. Not that I want to disgrace you, Larry dear," he continued; "just give me a farm of land, or anything that way at a reasonable rent, and I'll never be a burthen to you."

"My father has no farms to give," said Mr. Robert.

"Impertinent !" muttered his mother.

"Presumptuous !" chimed in the young ladies.

"Really, you ought to have stayed where you were," said Mr. Lorenzo, in a puzzled tone.

"I have quite enough to do to provide for my own family ; I have nothing to spare—nothing to give."

"God help the poor man !" said the returned stranger.

"Maybe if I had fall and plenty I'd be better treated. I'm tired and weary, Larry, with a long journey," he went on. "You wont deny me the shelter of your roof for a week until I recover myself. I'll not trouble you longer—I'll turn in my brain someway to help myself, and maybe you wont deny me a pound or two to help me back to Dublin. I have a friend there that I think will be a—a—I was going to say a brother to me, but I wont. It might be displeasing to you, and to

these elegant young ladies and their mam—ma. If you deny me that, I must only go down to Jack Clinty's—I met him on the road below—”

“You did not speak to him, I hope?” anxiously intercepted the affectionate brother, in a vexed tone.

“Not a word; he didn't know me—who would in these rags, and these grey hairs?” was the reply.

“It is very annoying—very *malapropos*,” went on Mr. Lorenzo, looking round at his family. “But if I thought that your stay would be *only* a week——”

“Not an hour longer, I'll promise you,” said the stranger, eagerly: “maybe not so long, if I can help it.”

The husband called the wife aside for consultation on hearing this consolatory declaration.

“This is a frightful business, my dear,” he

said ; “ but it cannot be helped ; we must only make the best of it. If we let him go to that Clinty’s—the fellow keeps a public house, and the whole thing will get wind. We *must* put up with him for a few days ; we can give him that lumber-room next to Mary’s ; and set her to have an eye on him.”

“ He must not make himself known as *your* brother ; I insist upon that,” replied Mrs. Lorenzo.

“ Certainly—quite right, my love—I shall make that an express stipulation.”

“ Nor he must not be talking with the servants.”

“ Surely not ; it would be intolerable,” said her husband.

“ Very well ; be it so,” said the lady ; “ but for Heaven’s sake get rid of him as soon as possible. I’m sure I never thought that *my* husband *could* have such a relative.”

“ I thought he was dead and buried years ago,” said Mr. Lorenzo.

"Unluckily that he was not," said his wife.

Meantime the returned relative looked quietly on at their cogitations, and when Mr. Lorenzo turned to him and said "follow me," in a gruff tone—he did as he was bid; and with an humble, but unreturned bow, he followed his rich, but not over-hospitable relative. •

In a few minutes Mr. Lorenzo returned with his daughter Mary in his train. She *was* small; but not very plain, after all. To be sure, her sisters were "dashers," and despised all who were not—that was the distinction. But her petite figure was full of easy, natural grace, and her soft blue eye, and rosy mouth seemed to have a kind look and pleasant smile for every one—even for her own family, who despised her.

"Listen to me, Mary," said her father, as if he were addressing a menial. "That man I introduced to you on the lobby is a relative—in fact, an unfortunate brother of mine——"

"My uncle——"

"Hush! Don't say that word again, if you please," said her mother, with a tremendous frown.

"Just so; don't repeat it," said her father. "He is to stay here for a few days; and you must see that he does not go much about, or colloque with the servants."

"*Colloque*, papa," exclaimed Belinda. "Is that English?"

"He means 'converse,' I presume," said her sister.

"I mean what I say," went on Mr. Lorenzo, impatiently. "You, Mary, are to look to this. Sit with him, chat with him, bring him what he wants, and remember that you will be answerable for the consequences."

"What consequences?" meekly inquired Mary.

"You are a fool," broke in her mother. "What consequences! The consequences of

having it known that a *beggar* belongs to us—such a beggar, coarse, lowborn, vulgar, as you, madam, would bring amongst us, if you could.”

“Go it; she deserves it,” encouraged Mr. Robert Mortimer.

Poor Mary humbly bowed to the storm, and inquired no more, but accepted the office assigned her of watching her own uncle as if he were a thief, and of treating him as if he were an outcast, which he, unfortunately, was.

CHAPTER II.

“AND this is the hole—I mean the room, my own brother puts me into, my dear?” asked the unfortunate Murty, in a fit of impolitic indignation, as Mary ushered him into a small attic, considerably filled with dilapidated furniture, and dismally small and dark; “its here I am to rest myself, is it?”

Mary blushed deeply at these pertinent questions, but answered kindly.

"I cannot answer for my father's acts or intentions," she said, with a smile, "nor can I venture to disobey them. But, although this room is not large, I can soon make it comfortable for you, sir, and while you stay in it, you shall find that you want for nothing. I'll be your attendant myself."

"You will, dear?" said the old man, looking at her most attentively. "Are these young ladies below stairs, your sisters, may I ask?"

"They are."

"Why, then, they don't look like you. What is your name?"

"Mary."

"But I suppose I am to call you *Miss* Mary."

"For what, sir? For shame! Are you not my own uncle, my father's brother?" faltered out the blushing girl.

"But I'm poor—miserably poor, Mary."

"Poverty is not a sin," said the young girl ;
"nor can all the riches of the world, or the
want of them, burst asunder the ties of blood
—the claims of kin."

"They ought not, you mean, my dear," said
the old man satirically. "Then you are not
ashamed of me, maybe?"

"Why should I, sir?" said poor innocent
Mary. "If you are old and in want, these
may be claims to my good feelings, but surely
they should not arouse my bad ones. You are
my father's brother—that is enough for me."

"Then maybe you'd get me a bit of break-
fast, Mary?" said the old man, "for I havn't
broken my fast yet, and poverty only sharpens
hunger. I thought so, when I saw the heaps
of good things at my brother's table, and I not
asked to eat a morsel—not a morsel," he re-
plied, bitterly.

The words were scarcely spoken when Mary
vanished, and in a few minutes returned with

a tray, neatly arranged, and filled with eatables. She placed it on the small table, and settled a chair for him.

"But these good things are not all for me?" he said. "Lar—I mean your papa will be displeased at such extravagance to me, whom he puts in a garret."

"No, no; I am to be your provider—your companion—your—"

"Jailer—don't mince the word," said Murty.

"No, I meant your attendant, sir, and as such I am privileged to deal with you as I please while you are under my charge," said Mary, in her cheerful, pleasant tone; "so sit down, if you please, and try this ham; I cured it myself, and I made this chicken pie also. I didn't make the bread, but I superintended its baking, and the cream and butter are from a cow that I reared from a calf myself—poor Molsheen I call her, and she knows me, and I think loves me, although she is *only* a brute."

"She would be a great brute if she did not," said the poor relation, cordially, cutting himself a slice of the bread, and buttering it with Molsheen's butter.

When he had finished his meal, Mary herself removed the tray, and that done, she set herself about making his room comfortable. She invited him into her own chamber while this was doing, and when he again entered his little place, he found it completely metamorphosed for the better. The lumber had been removed, a small camp bed put up, a chair or two, and a better table introduced, and a snug fire blazed in the little grate.

"And who did all this for me?" asked the old man, turning to the well pleased girl, who stood laughing by.

"Sally, the under housemaid, helped me," said Mary; "it was all easily done. I hope you will like it."

"But your mamma will be angry with you for doing it," suggested the old man.

"You wrong mamma, I think," said Mary, blushing; "but, at all events, she will know nothing about it. No one ever comes up here but the servant."

"Is not *your* room here, my dear?" said her uncle.

"Mine! oh! yes; but—but—"

"I understand all about it, Mary," said Murty, feelingly. "You are not exactly a servant in your father's house, but you are not treated as a daughter; is that it?"

"My father treats me as it seems right to him to do," said Mary, seriously. "I have no reason to complain, and I do not."

"Well, my dear, let us sit down and chat together," said her uncle. "I am old and poor, but I have seen a great deal of the world, and if I can give you nothing else, I can give you the benefit of my experience. It may be of use to you one day or other."

Mary sat down with him at the fire, and

found him both a pleasant and a profitable companion. It struck her that, as they became better acquainted, his manner and tone changed very much for the better. His vulgarity of expression ceased, and his language was that of the thoughtful and somewhat educated man, without being exactly that of a scholar or a gentleman.

When Mary remarked this, he laughed.

“You are a shrewd observer, my little friend,” he said, “and I dare say that the poverty of my condition did make me tone my language too low. But now, in return for your observation on me, let me give you my criticism on yourself, Mary. I don’t think you are happy here. Come now be candid with me; I am your own uncle, you know. You are set to cure, and brew, and bake, while others feast, and dress, and revel—a sort of housekeeper without salary. Am I not right?”

Mary was silent. She could not say it was not so.

"You won't blame your parents? Well, you are right, dear Mary," he said, warming. "But still I don't think you are happy—something lies on your mind, perhaps?"

The old man looked very knowing as he said this, and he smiled, until he saw that Mary's eyes were full of tears, and then he paused and took her hand in his.

"I knew it was so, Mary; I have heard something of your adventures as I travelled here," he went on. "Tell me, my child, is there not a—a sweetheart in the case? Don't hide your face, there is nothing to be ashamed of in loving an honest man, like Frank O'Hara."

"You know him, then?" said Mary, gasping and blushing.

"I have tried him, Mary," said the old fellow, seriously. "His father and I pegged tops and played marbles together; and when

I made myself known to him yesterday, he received me like a ——. Well, Mary, not like my own born brother, at all events. Tell me, dear heart, do you love him sincerely?"

"I—I acknowledge it," sighed Mary. "I cannot help it."

"Then you shall marry him, Mary," said her uncle, decidedly.

"My father will never hear of it," exclaimed Mary. "So don't talk of it again."

"Very well, let us talk of something else," said her charge.

All that day they spent together, unmolested, unvisited, by any of the other members of the family. At night, Mary was sent for and questioned, not as to the comforts of the old man, but as to his movements. But he had never left his chamber—never expressed a wish to do it, and Mary said so.

"Where is he now?" demanded her father.

"In bed—asleep, I believe," was the answer.

"I wish it were his last sleep," remarked Mr. Robert Mortimer, at which benevolent wish his sisters laughed loudly.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning, when Mary went to visit her uncle, he was gone.

She hastened to her father's room, and told him that her uncle's chamber was empty, and on inquiry it was found that he had left word with one of the servants that he would not return.

"What did he say, John?" asked his master.

The man hesitated.

"Speak when you are desired, sir," said his mistress, imperiously.

"He said, then, ma'am," replied the man, "that he was obleeged for your hospitality, but he hoped when he saw you in his house, that it's something better nor *that* kind of an Irish welcome he'd give you. 'I keep my lumber room for my cast-off furniture,' said he, 'not for my poor relations, and when I entertain my own brother, it's something better than a cowld shoulder I'll give him. Tell your master—and your mistress, just that, and no more nor no less, my man.' Them was his words, as near as I can remember them."

Mr. and Mrs. Lorenzo looked at each other, but their principal feeling was pleasure that he had departed, on any terms. His name, of course, was tabooed in the family circle, and

for a week or so they heard no more of the humble and unfortunate Murty Toole.

Again they were seated at a family breakfast, and Mr. Lorenzo was giving a quiet lecture to his son on his very extravagant habits, which were daily getting worse and worse, when the young man's attention was directed to the lawn, and rushing to the window he gazed out:—

“A splendid pair of greys, by Jupiter!” said he, with the ardent enthusiasm of a horse-fancier; “what a forehand—what paces! three hundred guineas, if they're worth a farthing!”

“And a capital turn out altogether,” said his father, who had followed him. “I wonder who it can be at this hour? Perhaps Lord Lionel coming to canvass for the county?”

“Run up and settle your hair, Belinda,” said Mrs. Lorenzo; “and do you sit down to practice, Juliana; you always look best at the harp, my love.”

The equipage stopped at the door, and before any of the family could recover their agitation, or settle themselves in their proper fashionable positions, the door was thrown open and there entered—

But no—it was impossible ! They gazed on the stranger, and then they stared at each other, while he advanced with smiling urbanity, and offered his hand to Mr. Lorenzo :—

“ You doubt my identity, Lar—I beg your pardon—LORENZO,” he said, cordially ; “ but I am the man you take me to be, nevertheless. I intruded on you the other day in a false character, and you treated me as you ought. I honor you for it. I am too well off myself to have any respect for a poor relation, and if you had appeared to me as I did to you, I would have put you in a coal cellar instead of a garret, and fed you on bread and water instead of anything better. Poverty is only made to be discountenanced ; you are a sen-

sible fellow, and deserve your prosperity. I congratulate you."

He then went the round of the entire family, complimenting and smiling, as though he had been received from the first with the sincerest welcome, while they, in their turn, received his compliments with a little confusion, but not without pleasure, when they glanced at his turn-out:—

"Ha! ha!" he said, laughingly to his brother; "it is not often that such unanimity of sentiment reigns in a family as I find in yours, Lorenzo. Your excellent family follow your lead as accurately as figures in an account, and it makes me sigh to think that I have neither wife nor child to whom I could set so excellent an example."

"Alas! and are they dead?" said Mr. Lorenzo, in a pathetic tone, taking his cue from his now revered relative.

"I never had them, man," said Mr. Murty.

"I have been too busy with Plutus to think of Cupid, and now I shall have to look to my relations or friends for heirs. I have sacks full of dollars, and know not what to do with them. By-the-bye, I don't see Mary—where is Mary?" he asked, looking round him.

"She is—in her own room," said her mother.

"Run up for her, if you please, ma'am," said her brother-in-law, carelessly, "and you, Mr. Mortimer, just tell one of my people to hand you the casket which he will find in the pocket of the chaise. I have brought a few chains, rings, brooches, and soforth, which I hope my charming nieces here will favor me by receiving. Be good enough to ask for them, Mr. Mortimer, if you please. By-and-bye, I hope to do something for you also, to show my sense of your merits and appearance. You are a credit to your family, sir, and a

very sensible fellow as well as your father, I see."

While Mr. Mortimer went on his errand, poor Mary was introduced by her smiling mother.

"Mary, my dear," said her uncle, kissing her forehead, "you are the only fool in your family, and I commiserate you. You require some good advice, child; and you are only fit to be a housekeeper. You may be of some use in my establishment—you are only in the way here; so if your father and mother will consent to part with you, I'll give you—yes, I'll give you twenty dollars a-year to clothe yourself, and your board for nothing. Of course, the bulk of my property will go—I won't say where—but, I dare say, I can manage to dispose of it properly. When one's own relations are prudent, there is a pleasure in taking care of them. I hate your generous

extravagant people ; no good ever comes of it. What say you, Mr. Lorenzo ? may I have Mary ? I'll take care of her, and teach her pride and propriety, I promise you."

It was a tempting offer. Mary was "a drug" in the domestic market ; and if Murty took her, she would form a link to keep alive the connexion. It was agreed that she should become her uncle's housekeeper, and the eccentric Murty, taking time by the forelock, desired her to put on her bonnet and shawl immediately.

"But surely you will stay a day or two with us ?" said Mrs. Lorenzo, affectionately.

"It's my great misfortune that I must be off at once, ma'am," said the old man ; "I am so pressed for time that I can't even wait for Mary to pack her bandboxes. But you shall hear from me. I hope the young ladies like

their trinkets. Be alive, Mary child, and get the dressing and kissing over as soon as possible."

He pressed her hand significantly, as he spoke, and she understood him at once. In fact, before the family had well recovered from their confusion at his re-appearance, he was ready to start again.

"I am to understand that I may do as I like with this unfortunate girl, am I not?" he said to his brother.

"Yes—certainly," said Mr. Lorenzo, whose conscience smote him for parting so easily with his own daughter.

"You'll find her rather slow, I fear, sir," said Mr. Mortimer.

"Good bye, Mary," said her sisters, as if they were heartily glad to get rid of her.

"I hope you will be able to make something of her," said Mrs. Lorenzo, playfully.

"I *will* make something of her, ma'am," replied the old man, in her own tone.

"Yes, yes; but if you think of returning to America, you must not make her quite a 'help,' or a slave, you know," rejoined the affectionate mother still smiling.

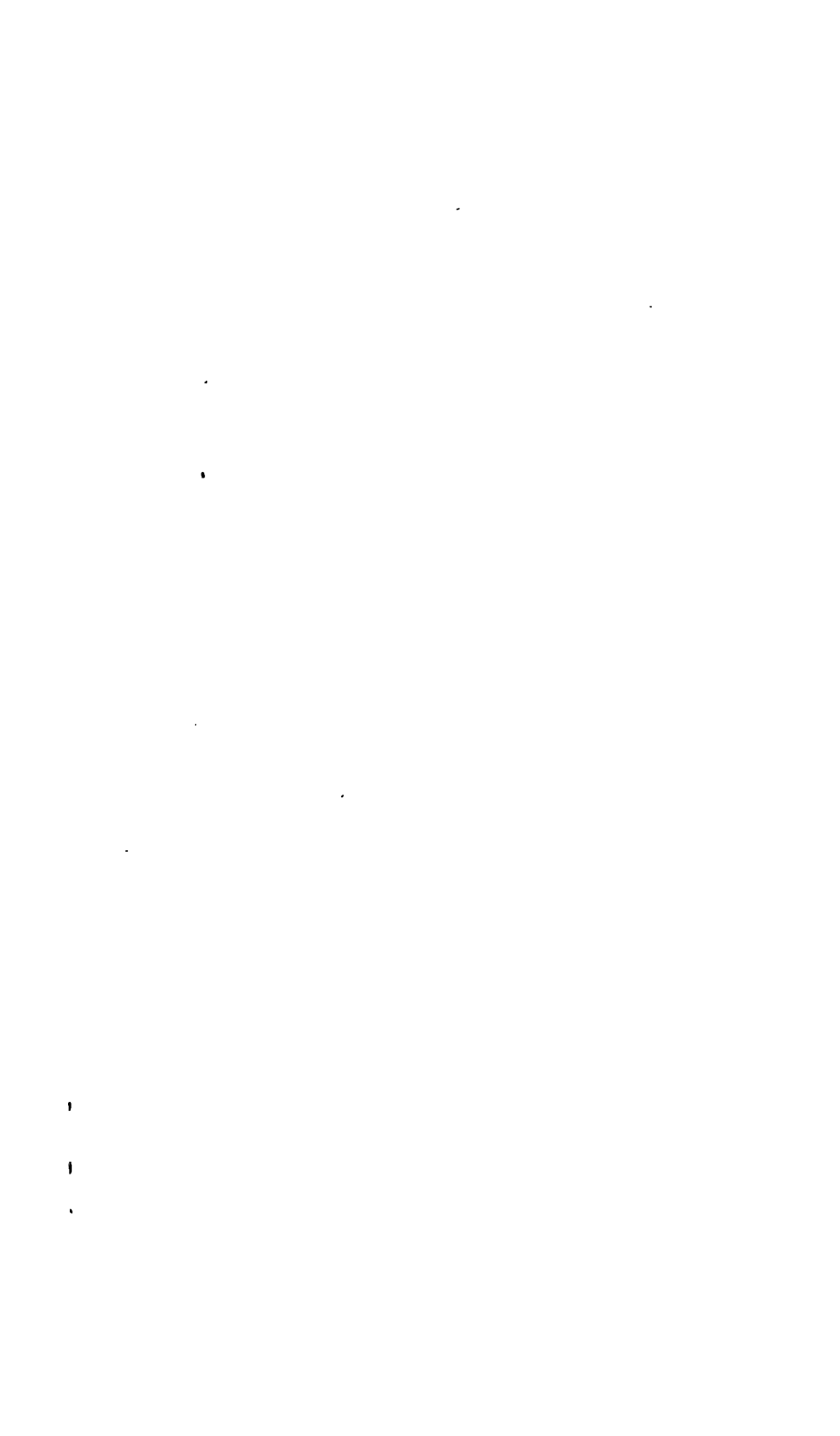
"Depend upon it, ma'am, I will take your advice," said Murty, with one foot in his splendid carriage, in which the humble, ill-used Mary was seated before him. "She has had enough and to spare of *that* sort of treatment, in her own immediate country and family. I'll try her on another tack, and see how it will answer. She shall be to me the child of my old age—the comfort of my life. While I live I will protect her, and when I die, she shall find that blood, after all, is thicker than water, and that as she did not discard or disdain me in my assumed poverty, I will not forget her in my will. Drive on, coachman; I take from Mount Toohil the

only valuable thing it contains, and I will take good care never to repeat my visit, for fear I should be put into the garret without a charitable Mary being near to make it comfortable."

And the eccentric old man was quite as good as his word. He never did return to Mount Toohil, and all that his family heard of his movements, was from a letter received by Mr. Lorenzo, dated New York, in six months after his short visit, stating, that as he didn't know anything better to do with Mary, he had given her in marriage to a certain Mr. Francis O'Hara, who had left Ireland with himself, and was now the junior partner in the great mercantile firm of Toole, Swartz, *and* O'Hara, one of the richest houses in the Union. "As to seeing me again in Ireland," concluded his letter; "I find that there is only one class of RETURNED EMIGRANTS welcome there—namely, those who have money to spare and share, and

as they are equally welcome everywhere, I think it better to stay where I am amongst kind friends, who even in my worst day, would never have treated me as a broken-down chair or dilapidated table, or thrust me into a lumber-room, when there was a better room vacant to stow me away. God bless you, and give you a more charitable heart, my dear Larry, or Lorenzo, if you like it better. You may be a great man in a small way, but greatness without goodness, is like a silver-dish without anything to put on it, and only proves that show without substance is never to be trusted. To be sure, as our poor deceased father used to say, it's hard to expect blood from a turnip, or make a silk-purse out of a sow's ear, although there *are* men who would never act as *one* of us has done, and as I hope the other will never be guilty of while his name is Murty Toole—without an O to it at all."

THE END.



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